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LOS ANGELES

A MARRIAGE OF SOULS.

A METAPHYSICAL NOVEL.

BY

VENI COOPER-MATHIESON.

THE UNIVERSAL TRUTH PUBLISHING CO

OF AUSTRALASIA,

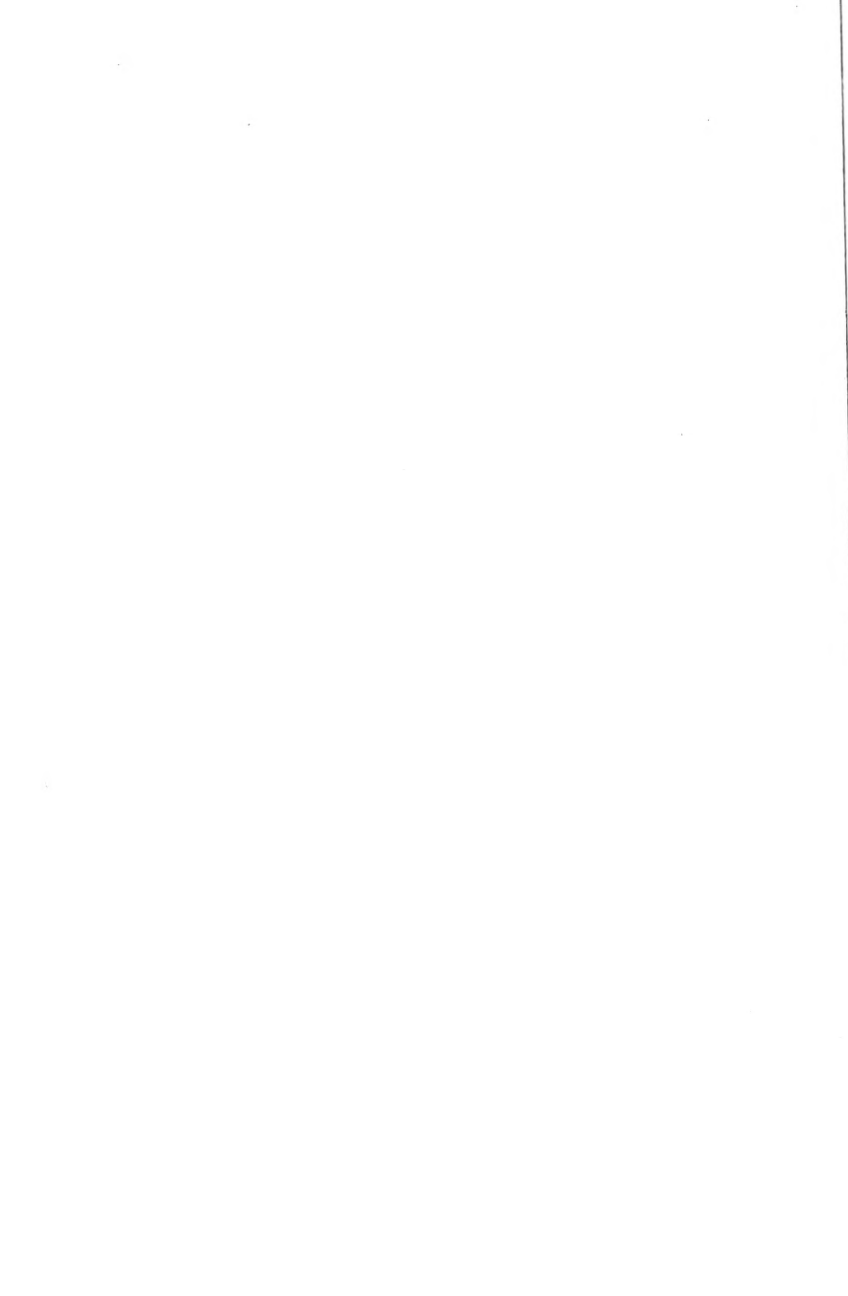
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Dedication.

DEDICATED

TO

"THE CHILDREN OF THE RESURRECTION."

"What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they?"

"These are they which came out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore they are before the throne of God and serve Him day and night in His temple; and He that sitteth upon the throne shall dwell among them."—REVELATIONS vii. 14 and 15.

* * * * *

"I will bring you to Zion; and I will give you pastors according to mine heart which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding."—JEREMIAH iii, 14 and 15.

* * * * *

"How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace: that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation: that saith unto Zion, Thy GOD reigneth!"—ISAIAH lii, 7.

* * * * *

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection."—REVELATIONS xx, 6.

* * * * *

"The wise shall understand."—DANIEL xii, 10.

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Foreword.

GREETINGS: To the four hundred and forty and four thousand having His Father's name written in their foreheads and who follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. For these were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and the Lamb.—(Revelations xiv, 1-4.)

BELOVED! To you, the Children of the Resurrection, do I venture to offer these first-fruits of my Resurrected Soul with sincere humility and sacred joy, for verily they are the living coals off the altar of a heart purified by suffering and redeemed by Divine Love.

To those whose feet are already planted upon Mount Zion and who, knowing as they are known, now behold the King in His beauty in a Land that is *not* very far off: to such I would humbly submit this firstborn of my soul in the hope that it will be accepted in the spirit in which it was created—the spirit of Universal Love—and all its weaknesses generously overlooked, while I ask that their illuminating thought be given unto me that I too may have greater spiritual strength accorded, to enable me to climb higher and still higher to that City set on a Hill.

To those whose strong voices have echoed down the aisles of Time and through their written thoughts have reached my straining ears long yearning to hear the message they wafted down to the listening ones of earth, out of the silence of the ages: to these I tender my heartfelt thanks with glad greetings and Love. These are the heralds of the Kingdom of God and His Christ, and they shall have right to the Tree of Life, and shall enter in through the Gates into the Heavenly City.

To those who are still struggling in the valley of doubt, and are weary and heavy-laden with the burden of sorrow and dark despair; to such as wander through the Vale of Tears wondering if there be a God or is He dead? To such I cry with a loud voice: "Ho! every one that thirsteth, come drink of the living waters, and he that hath no money come buy and eat, without money and without price." Yes, "Thy God reigneth!" So "Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God!" To these sad and seeking ones of earth I would pray that these thoughts and the story of one who struggled and suffered and overcame, may prove helpful and inspiring, and may also encourage them to climb on, climb ever! for there's light on the hill top

FOREWORD.

to guide every earnest seeking soul home to its Father's House, where a rest abideth for the people of God, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes, and there shall be no more sorrow and sighing, for the former things are passed away and behold ! all things are made new. Then, struggling souls, press onward. There's always help at hand if ye will but ask and seek in faith and prayer !

To the reader who reads but does not yet understand, I would venture to remark that TRUTH has many aspects, like the views seen by one who is climbing a high mountain ; therefore, until, like the mountain climber, you have reached the summit and from every point beheld its glorious vistas stretching away in the distance, it would be but kind and wise to defer judgment. In the meantime, to such I wish a hearty God-speed !

To all who run and all who read, do I give warm and loving greetings in the Spirit of Love and Life ; while I testify that I am but thy fellow-servant, and that these sayings are faithful and true. For the Lord God of the holy prophets of old sent His Spirit to show unto me His servant the things that are written in this book.

Then surely the Lord Jesus Christ will come quickly, for now are we in the latter days ; therefore all faithful souls unite in saying, " Even so come, Lord Jesus," and reign in the hearts of Thy many brethren, and set up Thy Kingdom here upon earth, where God the Father shall dwell among us for ever and throughout all eternity.

With sisterly Love, as the Handmaiden of the Lord,

I am, yours in the testimony of Jesus,

VENI COOPER-MATHIESON.

JANUARY 5TH, 1906.

SYDNEY, N.S.W.,

AUSTRALIA.

Prologue.

A U S T R A L I A .

To eastward, when cluster by cluster
Dim stars and dull planets that muster,
Wax wan in a world of white lustre
That spreads far and high.
In the gathering of night-gloom o'erhead in
The still silent change ;
All fire-flushed when forest trees redden
On slopes of the range.
When the gnarled knotted trunks eucalyptian
Seem carved, like weird columns Egyptian,
With curious device—quaint inscription,
And hieroglyph strange.
In the Spring when the wattle gold trembles
'Twixt shadow and shine,
When each dew-laden air draught resembles
A long draught of wine ;
When the sky-line's blue burnished resistance
Makes deeper the dreamiest distance,
Some song in all hearts hath existence—
Such songs have been mine.

—ADAM LINDSAY GORDON, "A Dedication."

AUSTRALIA, Land of the Dawning, all hail !

Thou art like a lovely virgin freshly risen from the waves to greet the dawn of a new creation ; clothed in thine own pristine beauty ; covered only with a transparent robe of tender green, fleecy white and ethereal blue. Thy foundations rest upon the heaving bosoms of three great oceans, the meeting place of many waters. Thou art wondrous in variety, changeable in thy moods, the centre of extremes—for in thy vast solitudes extremes meet.

But what a strangely mysterious land is Australia. Rightly has she been called "The Land of the Dawning," since she is yet enfolded in the mists of early morning, and her future destiny looms vague and gigantic—a Dream—a Prophecy.

Other lands have their own peculiar charms, but Australia differs greatly from them all. Grotesque, weird, sternly grand : a haughty and solitary queen in her own domains. Disdaining

all others, proudly scornful, and ignoring taunts and jeers and the slights of nations that will have declined when she shall flourish and shall be sufficient unto herself. Dwelling in a solitude that is akin to desolation, with no knightly legend or tender sentiment of romantic story to soothe and charm the ear. A silence that might be felt is experienced by the wanderer through those vast solitudes—those primeval forests, funereal and stern, which clothe the valleys and bases of the mountains, all bare and awe-inspiring in their rugged grandeur; mountains whose deep dark gorges strike terror to the heart of man and make him feel but a pigmy in those mighty fastnesses, where no voice but his own disturbs the awful stillness. Here it is when savage winds roar through the rocky clefts, a mournful dirge echoes across the desolate stretches of forest, plain, valley or hill tops, like the eerie wail of a troubled spirit, that will not be comforted.

In the Australian forests life is eternal and the foliage always green. The leaves fall not when the year is dying, but the great white gum-trees shed their bark, which hangs from their giant trunks in long strips that rustle in the night-winds with a weird ghostly sound, accentuating the melancholy of the scene and filling the heart of the lonely bushman with an unwholesome fear and dread as he rides through those silent fastnesses, or across the bare and trackless wastes of arid plain or desert land. Here between day and night he fancies he sees shadows vast and imposing stealing across his pathway, or creeping silently behind him; or again hears strange noises that make his nerves quiver with suppressed horror of—he knows not what. The very silence and mystery in itself is terrifying as any traveller can testify who has tramped through weary miles of that strange Continent.

The animals, too, are grotesque. Some of them have not yet learned to walk upright as men, yet do not go on all fours as beasts. They appear to be in a state of but partial development, as though civilization had come upon them and arrested their growth before their evolution was completed. The great grey kangaroos hop noiselessly through the scrub and disappear among the tall coarse grass, or at night, when the brilliant moonlight floods hill and forest till all is as bright as day, they appear and disappear like ungainly ghosts gaunt and grey.

The flowers, too, have not yet evolved their soul's incense and have no perfume, though arrayed in many gay colors and of strange forms and markings. The birds have not yet learned to sing, but practice their notes with a weird medley of sounds, at midnight as well as at morn, and the echoes ring through the wooded valleys and mountain ravines with a sad note of mourning, interrupted by the shrill discordant shriek of cockatoo or paroquet, or the wail of the curlew; while at sunrise and sunset the mocking laugh of the kookaburra, or "laughing jackass," joins hilariously in the chorus. Yet what they lack in song they

are amply compensated for in their glory of plumage, which outrivals the rainbow in variety of tints and brilliancy of coloring.

Summer oppresses with fervent heat, and brings fierce hot winds, droughts and bush fires, with the consequent desolation; while springtime is glorious in her revelry of beauty. Winter in turn unlocks her floodgates and deluges fields, valleys, plains and villages, while mountain torrents tearing down deep ravines flood creeks and rivers, scattering devastation throughout their tumultuous course to the sea. Thus in one fell swoop obliterating with Nature's well-known recklessness the results of man's long years of patient toil, throwing back in his face the efforts he has made to subdue her by blind force or by scientific inventions in his attempts to win his rightful sphere of dominion over all things, while he pushes onward in the March of Progress to a higher civilization.

But is Australia civilized? Nay, her history is yet to be made, her possibilities to be discovered, her education to be completed, before she can take her place among the civilized nations of the world, and reign, as she eventually will, Queen of All! Now, like an uncultured child, she revels in her wild untrammelled freedom, her extremes of originality as expressed so vividly in her native wilds—a country that is not like any other under the sun.

All her moods are unique, fear-inspiring, gloomy, grand or awful, except where the refining touch of civilization has trained her into softer aspects and gentler tones. In her early days the very mountain peaks were named after the gloomy sensations which their aspect awakened in the breasts of the explorers, such as "Mt. Desolation," "Mt. Terrible," and "Mt. Despair." These are the monuments which stand to testify to the sufferings which Nature inflicted upon those who, with intrusive feet and vandal hands, attempted to force their way into those secret places or pluck aside the veil that concealed her mysteries, hidden in the bosom of this her youngest-born child of nations—Fair Australia. This was the punishment inflicted upon those who strove to wrest from her that virgin seclusion which had for so many centuries enveloped her as with a shroud, enfolding her in an oblivion that was deeper than the tomb—such an oblivion as can alone surround an undiscovered country—and rendered her secure from the prying eyes of nations that flourished, declined and decayed while Australia slept upon the bosom of the blue Pacific.

This long, long sleep was not disturbed by the sounds of aught but her own native tribes and the animal life that found sustenance from her capacious bosom; slept, since the hour unknown to living man, when as the resurrected portion of the lost Lemuria she first emerged by slow degrees from the womb of the waters and stood forth naked and solitary under the Southern Cross, beneath a canopy of vivid blue, illuminated at intervals by the wondrous glory of the Southern Lights, the

beautiful "Aurora Australis," till at length after long ages of darkness "the day broke and the shadows fled away," and Australia stood revealed in all her beauty before the rising sun of CIVILIZATION.

Still no man knoweth thee, O! Virgin Land! No hand hath yet uncovered thy secret parts, nor eye searched out thy hidden mysteries. In thy fair bosom thou holdest treasures unknown and even undreamed of. In thy great heart are hidden countless tons of golden ore and wealth unlimited. In thy unexplored wildernesses mysteries of dead centuries lie concealed.

Yet the hand of time has but touched thee lightly, and on thy white brow rests the diadem of youth and beauty undimmed by decay, while, like an aureole, the bow of promise arches over thy mimosa-wreathed head.

The promise written there we read by the spirit of prophecy. It is the vision of the Future that reveals to the waiting nations that thou, O! Queen of the South! thou last of the lands to arise from the sea, shall yet be first in splendour, greatest in wisdom and highest in power and glory. Out of thee shall sons and daughters arise that shall be mighty before the Lord of Life; and from them shall come the seed of the new and regenerate humanity—the Children of the Resurrection, which shall claim the promised Kingdom of Christ upon earth—a Kingdom of Peace and Goodwill in the hearts of all mankind. Then shall dawn the day when the prophecy shall be fulfilled that "the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ."

This then is the compensation that shall be accorded thee for all the indignities and slights that have been heaped upon thee, O! Beauteous Land of the Southern Seas! Thou who hast been abused, defiled, degraded and ravished of thy purity and beauty in thy early days; thy water-locked shores made to serve as prison walls for thousands. Thy silent fastnesses to echo with the cries and groans of suffering human beings. Thy very maidenly modesty and retirement hidden as thou wert in sweet seclusion and solitary grandeur, was thy greatest attraction and caused thee to be singled out from among so many that flaunted their charms and claims to preference before the civilized world. These were thy rare virtues and they led to thy early fall. Hence thy first years were blighted with a myriad shameful defilements before thy true worth and beauty were recognised, thy loveliness prostituted and thy virginity ravaged by making thee a charnel house for criminals, a scapegoat for sins not thine own. Those who in thy infant days constituted themselves thy guardians and the possessors of thy charms, while "drest in a little brief authority," soiled the opening pages of thy fresh girlhood's history with the taint of their own lawlessness and by crimes unmentionable. This, too, till thy once unknown name rang in the ears of all civilized nations with an unenviable

notoriety and was blazoned in large black letters on the annals of England's criminal calendar.

But despite thy early defilement thou shalt once more arise like a Phoenix from the ashes of that dead past : rise to triumph over all thy detractors and put to shame those who once scoffed and sneered at thee in the hours of thy affliction and the days of thy bitterest humiliation. Like Jerusalem, thou shalt yet put on thy beautiful garments of purity and righteousness and rise superior to all thy foes; rise to reign a Queen Regnant. For, O mysterious Land, thou hast never been conquered, but like a gem upon the bosom of the sea thou wast discovered, and because of thy then unknown character thou wert lightly held and little esteemed, thy value unrecognised. But soon thy redeemer shall arise from out thine own bosom and shall restore thee to thy original perfection and reveal thee to the whole world as the fairest among the Cities of Peace (daughters of Jerusalem) and the altogether loveliest of all lands.

Now having awakened from thy long, long sleep of oblivion and arisen in silence and solitude from out the great heart of the Universe, thou shalt indeed evolve from within thyself—from out the very centre of thy being—the Love-life which shall prove to be the salvation of all nations. Yea, "the leaves of the trees shall be for the healing of the nations," and already are the leaves and sap of the fragrant eucalyptus, whose roots find sustenance in thy soil, a healing balm to thousands.

Then in a more elevated sense shall this same healing be effected, for the day is at hand when Australia's righteous laws of wisdom, justice and truth and her unfailing abundance and continued prosperity shall be known throughout all lands, and the fame of her shall go forth like unto the fame of Solomon while many kings of the earth, like the Queen of Sheba, shall seek the precincts of her shores seeking wisdom, or in time of dire disaster and world-turmoil, a City of Refuge, a Place of Peace. For her ways shall be ways of pleasantness and all her paths be peace and her laws be just and righteous laws. Health, happiness and prosperity shall be established within her water-locked gates to which all the weary ones of earth shall come seeking and finding rest therein, and they shall not go out any more forever, for the Sun of Righteousness shall shine in that City of Harmony and there will be no night of sin or ignorance there.

Australia shall be a second Nazareth, since out of her shall come the New Messiah—a great teacher—who shall prepare them for the Coming Kingdom and shall reveal unto the nations the great and glorious truths that are to be unveiled in these latter days—the same vital truths which Jesus taught the multitudes over nineteen hundred years ago in the cities of Judea. This truth has already been re-born in America—the Cradle of Liberty—which is the modern Bethlehem. There it has received new birth through the free womanhood of that race who have nursed and cherished it with tenderness and

unselfish devotion to their high ideals, till it has grown in stature and grace and has already become a power in all lands and the wise men of the earth have heard of it.

But out of Nazareth must the saviour come. And as there is a mystic duality in unity revealed between America and Australia, the first "A" represents the modern Bethlehem and the second "A" symbolizes the Nazareth of these latter days. Yet in these two a third is included, the "Z," which is New Zealand, the Zion of the New Dispensation; therefore as the first two A's represent the ALPHA, so the third—the "Z"—represents the OMEGA. Thus we have a trinity in unity, for in this vast Australasia (the resurrected Lemuria), the first of the lands though now the last, we behold the perfect Whole revealed—the Promised Land.

History repeats itself. As the mystic symbolism of man's soul was represented in the Bible by cities, nations and peoples through individuals, so shall these things be; and we may now look for the early appearing of the Great Prophet of these latter days, who will again teach the buried Truths in purity and simplicity, the Truths of Life and Being hidden for ages beneath the dust of dogmas and traditions; and when these are revealed to all the waiting world a new era shall be opened up for this dawning century that shall herald the coming of the new Kingdom of Love, which is everlastingly the Kingdom of Christ on earth.

Then in the words of the Prophet of Israel: Rejoice and be glad, O! Australia, thou New Jerusalem of the South, for great is thy future, grand, mystical and glorious beyond compare. Dark, drear and long has been thy night of gloom and ignorance, but behold! joy cometh in the morning; and thou shalt sing, O! barren that thou didst not bear, for truly greater and more numerous shall thy children be than are those of the nations that reviled thee, and thou shalt triumph over all thy foes. The day is now dawning when thou shalt awaken to a full realization of thine own power and know thy strength, and shall show forth in splendor and undimmed brilliancy thy eternal beauty and perfection, the Crown of Civilization.

O! Civilization, thou mighty conquering god born of the mind of Man, what wilt thou not win and hold inviolate from that vast Universe that brought thee forth, and of which thou too art a part in the great plan! Surely thy power is limitless? Thy future destiny a thing too glorious, too wonderful for even the present age of Man's development to conceive of with any degree of accuracy. Thy growth is marvellous and still thou art evolving to greater and still greater heights. Thy dominion over all things is a promise that is being daily fulfilled—"Ye shall be as gods," and gods we verily are; for in the same degree as MAN is the expression of the Mind of God—is the effect of First Cause—so Civilization is the higher expression of the mind of MAN. Therefore, inasmuch as civilization to-day

reveals the growth of Man's advancement from ignorance to knowledge, from knowledge gained by experience to ultimate wisdom, or from glory to glory, so does Man thus reveal to himself his own inherent powers and manifests the great Life Principle of the Universe—the Principle which brought him into Being and which Principle man has named GOD. Thus as civilization is inseparable from Man's highest expression of himself—individually, nationally and universally—so is Man inseparable from his One Cause : THAT which expresses Itself through Man to highest perfection, and in this manner the seeming two are united ; God and Man are ONE.

VENI COOPER MATHIESON.

"A Marriage of Souls."

A METAPHYSICAL NOVEL.

(BY VENI COOPER-MATHIESON.)

THE ALLEGORY.

THE COMING OF A SOUL.

"With trailing clouds of glory do they come,
From God, Who is their home."

—WORDSWORTH.

When Australia was supposed to be nearly one hundred years old, as the annals of civilization estimate the age of a country, it came to pass that a little before midnight on the 24th of December, A.D. 18—, the Golden Gates of Life were opened by two angels to allow a Child-Soul to pass through into the regions beyond that Kingdom of Life; and the destination of that young soul was Australia! The two angels who stood on the threshold holding the gates ajar were glorious in their apparel and beauteous to behold. The masculine angel was strong, fearless, noble, and kingly in look and mien; yet benignant and of gracious countenance. The feminine angel was a sweet and gentle presence, fair of face and graceful of form, pure of mind and true of heart, soft of speech, loving, tender, and patient of demeanour, and altogether adorable. Then the Child-Soul appeared at the portals they held open, and she also was divinely fair and good to look upon; a very beautiful young soul, pure and spotless as the newly fallen snow, and shining with the effulgence of heavenly light which flooded her pathway, as she stepped lightly across the threshold and emerged into the gloom beyond, where the deep shadows of the

unknown world to which she was bound threatened to envelop her frail and ethereal form. For a few moments the Child-Soul paused and trembled, then looked back wistfully into the bright land behind her, which she was then leaving for a season while she fulfilled her mission on earth in obedience to her Father's Will. Her momentary pause and shudder, together with the half-fearful cry that fell from her young lips—and which, even then at that great distance, was heard and recognised as the herald of her coming in the land below, to which her footsteps were bent—these tokens of dread and fearfulness on the part of the young Soul, then going forth into life and action anew, were noticed and well understood by the watching angels at the Gate of the Golden City of Life Eternal; and she heard the encouraging tones of her Father's voice say, tenderly, and with strong assurance, as the words reached her listening ears:—

“My daughter, have no fear, there is naught that can harm thee. There is nothing beyond greater than thyself—thy fair and glorious Self, thou daughter of God! Go forth fearlessly in thy Father's power and strength, and His wisdom will ever be thy guide. These are but shadows that thou seest below thee; phantoms of the night of gloom that rests upon the land to which thy feet are bent; but give forth thy message bravely, boldly and truly, and it will dispel these shadows, born of ignorance, and they shall all flee away. They are but Illusion, and are *not*. Now, my daughter, to remind thee that this is so, and that if thou wilt but use the sword I have given thee—MY WORD—they will vanish like mists before the sun, I bestow upon thee the name “MAYA,” for by it shalt thou be known when thou art recognised as my child, for, as Maya, thou art the celestial maiden, who personifies the active will of the Creator of the Universe, and in such resurrected perfection thou shalt return unto thy Father's house. Be strong, faithful, and true unto the end, and I will give thee a crown of victory in this my kingdom of eternal life.”

Then the Child-Soul bent her face before Him in all His majesty, and He laid His hands upon her head and blessed her. After which the other angel spread her out-stretched wings over the Child-Soul tenderly and broodingly, as she said in caressingly sweet tones :—

“ Yes, go, my child of glory, and do the will of thy Heavenly Father in all things ; first by submitting thyself in humble obedience to the parents we have chosen for thee on the earth plane ; loving thy brothers and sisters, and relinquishing thine own will, learn to do only the will of the Highest ; spend thyself in service for suffering humanity and teach them the highest truths—the laws of their own beings—till they know that the Lord God Omnipotent, reigneth within their souls for ever and ever. Go, my sweet child, in holy love, and take from me also a name, to remind thee of thy divine parentage and thy spiritual home, while thou sojournest in the vale of tears and dwellest in a temple of flesh. The name I now give thee is ‘ EDNA,’ It is my own, or was, when I too walked in the valley of shadows. Thou wilt read of me while there in the book they call ‘ Tobit,’ which at one time formed a part of the Bible of that people. I was the mother of Sarah, who after having married seven husbands—all of whom died without having known her—eventually married Tobias, the son of Tobit, a holy and good man, who was led to find her through the guidance of an angel, and thus was she at length united to her soul’s husband, her true mate, after much tribulation in the flesh. The name I have given thee, EDNA, means *Pleasure* in the Hebrew language, but the one thou has just received from thy Father, and which in the world means *Illusion*, will help thee to remember that this is exactly what the former is when sought only for the gratification of fleshly desires. Thou art now going forth to fulfil thy mission and to seek thy soul’s other half, and in thy going thou shalt be guided and protected from evil by the angels of love and purity.

Remember, I shall never leave thee nor forsake thee, my beloved child, till, having passed through many tribulations to achieve thy soul's great mission to the world, and with thy message delivered fearlessly and faithfully, thy work performed truly and well, thy soul's partner found and redeemed from the bondage of the lower senses, and taught by thee to walk by thy side in purity and holiness as children of the resurrection, thou return unto us as one flesh. Then will thy soul's garments be white and glistening, and thou, purified by suffering, made strong by trial, sorrow and disappointment, justified through righteousness, and sanctified by sacrifice of self, shalt at last be glorified with the glory that thou now hast with us, and art this hour laying down to learn what it means to do thy Father's Will and become One with Him for ever. Farewell ! my beloved child, till that great day of thy home-coming. Now go, and my love overshadows thee for all time and reaches into endless eternities."

Bending, the angel kissed the sweet lips of the Child-Soul, and then there was silence. The next moment the Gates were closed behind her, and solitary she sped forth on her long, lonely journey, leaving the Kingdom of Light and Love far behind her, while she seemed to be rushing through space at a terrific rate, and soon the light of the City was wholly obliterated. Then she was plunged into stygian darkness, where it seemed that myriads of gibbering phantoms leered and *moued* at her out of the gloom that enveloped her as with a pall. Some tried to clutch at her garments as she passed, others threw obstacles across her path to bar her way and stay her onward course ; again, some daring ones caught her in their sharp claws and held her back, but they only succeeded in tearing her " trailing robes of glory," in which she was clothed when she left her Father's Kingdom ; these she was content to leave in their hands, so that she herself was not stayed in her downward progress to the land for which she was bound.

In her eager haste to avoid the menacing forms that barred her way, sometimes she fell, but though bruised and sorely wounded, she rose to fight yet stronger against their cruel onsets, and with a desperation born almost of despair at times, pressed on, on, on, her course ever and always downward, till she seemed to be passing through the midst of endless worlds, all enshrouded in darkness—to her weary eyes that could then see nothing clearly, they seemed a very bottomless pit.

Once, thinking she saw a gleam of light in the distance, she pressed on more eagerly towards it, not keeping watch around her as she sped, when suddenly she felt a cord tighten about her body, and her progress was stayed. This proved to be a more cruelly vindictive and selfish demon than the others, who, coveting her sweet purity and holy innocence, had looped a cord and thrown it like a lasso over her, binding her tightly, as she hurried past him. By this demon she was bound and held for what, to her eager soul, seemed ages of time, though in reality but a short season in the eternity to which this Child-Soul was an heiress. She, however, made desperate efforts to release herself, but to no effect, and it seemed that all her struggles were in vain, since as soon as she freed herself from one knot another was made and the cord tightened more securely. Thus this demon continued to hold her imprisoned, and grinned malignantly at her vain efforts to be free, for he deemed her secure and in his possession for ever. But in this hour of deepest torture and despair she suddenly remembered the name her Father in Heaven had bestowed upon her—"MAYA"—and its meaning—Illusion—while she also recalled the words spoken to her by Him before she left His gracious presence: "These are but shadows, use your Sword—My Word—which I have given you, and they will vanish." She quickly obeyed, and speaking only the Word of Truth, realized the next moment that she was—Free. But she had been so tightly bound that the cords had bruised and wounded her delicate body,

and it had consequently cost her a terrible wrench to win her freedom. The rebound also had given such an impetus to her downward course that once more she could not see where she was going in the thick darkness that enveloped her, and for a long time felt utterly lost and forsaken, till in terror and despair she called aloud, " Help me ! O, Help me, my Father, my Father ! Oh, Fair Love, why hast thou, too, forsaken me ? "

The next sensation she experienced was that her speed had increased and she was still being hurled through space with terrible velocity, till, with a suddenness that was appalling, she felt herself crash into something that obstructed her way, and which she was quite unable to avoid. It was a Star ; and so great was the impact that it was shattered into millions of particles, and she was enveloped in a dense cloud of its sparkling atoms, so that her eyes were dazzled by the brilliancy around her, while she was dazed and almost suffocated by the gases and smothered in star-dust. In her terror she clutched mechanically at one of the falling pieces near, that seemed larger than the others, and her grasp closing upon it, she held it firmly with her tiny hands, where it seemed to shine in her face with a bright lustre that resembled diamonds. While she kept a tight hold upon this shattered nucleus of a world, it acted as ballast to steady her course as she descended, for she was now aware that her speed had considerably slackened and slowly, more slowly with her grasp still firm upon it, she continued to sink gently down, down, down ; lower, lower, lower ; slower, slower, slower ; and then—STOP !

EDNA MAYA opened her eyes to discover that once again she was in light which beamed all around her—bright light in comparison to that through which she had come, yet quite unlike the light of her heavenly home. Then on her ears sweet music fell, the music of pealing bells, such as she had also heard in her far-away home above, that home which she seemed to have left ages ago. Next she was conscious of

sensation and vision, and so began to look around her to ascertain where she was, and what place was this to which she had come, but a cursory glance revealed that everything was strange to her, and no familiar object met her startled gaze ; she seemed all alone. What strange new land was this ? What a queer country ! It was not light nor yet was it quite dark, like the terrible darkness through which she had passed to reach it. Yes, she thought, this was surely the earth plane she had heard about, but truly it was a "Twilight Land ?" The home she had come from was the land of the glorious sunshine, and she felt lonely and solitary now that she remembered how very far away it must be, and that her weary soul would have to climb, climb, climb every bit of that long road back before she should again see the portals of her soul's fair abode, or behold the faces of her Heavenly Father and the bright angel of love. Then she longed intensely for her beautiful angel mother, she who had given her the promise that "she would never leave her nor forsake her." Alas ! Where was she now ? She needed her so much at this moment of utter weariness, for the Child-Soul was exhausted and weak after her long and painful journey to earth. In her misery and utter abandonment she gave vent to a cry of terror, when, lo ! there bent over her a beautiful face whose eyes smiling serenely, tenderly, lovingly into hers, reminded her of her spiritual mother, though in other respects the face was dissimilar.

Was this the earthly parent of whom her Angel Mother had spoken and bidden her love and obey ? If so, she meant to do all in her power to follow out those instructions. Then to this new mother, this fair and lovely woman who was so like her spiritual mother, the Child-Soul nestled close and the soft gentle arms drew her into her bosom and there ministered unto her bodily needs, giving her sustenance from her own fountain of life and love, and fondling her in a sweetly caressing way while she cooed and smiled down upon her where she lay, till at last the

Child-Soul was satisfied, and sighed with a deep content. Just at that moment a voice, strong, deep and yet pitched low, said just over her head, in tones that seemed glad and grateful :—

“ A little daughter, eh ? She has been sent to us as a gift from God this bright Christmas morning. Well, sweet wife, you have indeed given me a welcome Christmas box in this our fair young first-born. May God bless and keep you both ! ”

Then there was a strange noise like a loud report against the Child-Soul's face, and something rough and prickly touched the velvety soft cheeks so hard that it caused her to cry out in pain and fright. But the woman-mother hushed her softly, and presently she was again lying peacefully against her warm bosom drinking in that sweet refreshing draught that flowed therefrom, and soothed and satisfied all her immediate longings, inducing a feeling of drowsiness to which she was just about to give way when she once more heard the sweet voice of the woman-mother speaking faintly, in hushed accents, words which seemed strangely familiar to the ears of the Child-Soul, for they voiced the very names that had been given her by her heavenly parents before she left her own bright home above.

“ So, dearest husband, as it is a girl, you will be quite willing that she should be called by the names we chose for her, ‘ EDNA BEULAH MAYA ’ ? You know they are meant to imply Pleasure, Peace and Happiness. Therefore, as she has come to us on this Christmas morning, we will strive to bring her up as a daughter of God.”

To which the voice of the man-father replied, earnestly :—

“ Quite willing, dearest wife. Since you have given me our first-born on Christmas-day, as you say, it is a fitting thing that she should be a ‘ Child of God,’ a sacred trust from the Heavenly Father.”

Then there was silence, and the Child-Soul slept ; a long, long sleep of sense, during which she only *dreamed* that she was a “ Daughter of God,” yet the

conviction was strong within her heart and stirred her soul's depths occasionally by deep and passionate longings, that some day she was to do something noble and great, something that would prove her celestial parentage, and in doing which she would be fulfilling the mission entrusted to her by her Father in Heaven. Then, and only then, would she be able to claim her holy name, "MAYA," and become a Christ of Women, as Jesus had been a Christ of Men.

But many earth years passed away ere the Child-Soul awoke from her sense-sleep to claim her glorious title of God's Daughter, bestowed upon her from the beginning, when she was in the bosom of her Spiritual Father. Nevertheless she had an early instinctive conviction that this inheritance was to be hers in the end, in conjunction with all Souls, as promised by her great Elder Brother, Jesus, who was then the Christ, and who, when He had finished His great mission and was about to return to their Father's House, said He was going to *his* Father and *their* Father ; to *his* God and *their* God ; and that with Him all were joint heirs, therefore sons and daughters of God, when they learned to do their Father's will wholly ; then children of the kingdom of eternal life, from which all Child-Souls come, and to which all souls return to abide for ever and ever, as children of the resurrection, and therefore the grand and glorious family of God.

" For God created Man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of His own eternity. Nevertheless, through envy of the devil came death into the world, and they that do hold of his side do find it." (APOC-RYPHA, " The Wisdom of Solomon," II-23-24.)

CHAPTER I.

A SOUL IN THE MAKING.

HOLY MARRIAGE.

"The law forbids adultery; but in the eyes of law adultery is an overt act, the satisfaction of the sensuous self outside the marriage bonds.

"Now marriage in the sight of the law is but a promise made by man and woman, by the sanction of a priest, to live for aye in harmony and love.

"No priest or officer has power from God to bind two souls in wedded love.

"What is the marriage tie? Is it comprised in what a priest or officer may say?

"Is it the scroll on which the priest or officer has written the permission for the two to live in marriage bonds?

"Is it the promise of the two that they will love each other until death?

"Is love a passion that is subject to the will of man?

"Can man pick up his love as he would pick up precious gems or lay it down or give it out to anyone?

"Can LOVE be bought and sold like sheep?

"Love is the power of God that binds two souls and makes them one; there is no power on earth that can dissolve the bond.

"The bodies may be forced apart by man or death for just a little time; but they will meet again.

"Now in this bond of God we find the marriage tie; all other unions are but bonds of straw, and they who live in them commit adultery.

"The same as they who satisfy their lust without the sanction of an officer or priest.

"But more than this: the man or woman who indulges lustful thoughts commits adultery.

"Whom God hath joined together man cannot part; whom man has joined together live in sin."

—Words of Jesus the Christ, from THE AQUARIAN
GOSPEL OF JESUS THE CHRIST, Chapter 98, 1-15.

Edna Beulah Maya Esbourne was the first-born child of Mr. and Mrs. George Esbourne, of "Cumboo-queepa" Station, on the Riverina, in New South Wales. Their family consisted of five—two sons and three daughters—of whom Edna was the eldest, then followed Leonard, Frank, Ella and Grace, the latter being the youngest and about fourteen years of age

when our story of their lives opens. She was a frail lovely little creature, but an invalid with spinal complaint since she met with an accident during a terrible bush fire, that destroyed the homestead ten years previously, and left her bound to her couch a patient sufferer and the pet of the whole household at "Cumbooquepa."

But Edna—the queenly Edna—was the beauty and pride of them all. She favored her mother in general appearance, but was dark complexioned like her father and with many of his inherent traits of character, though the sweet feminine attributes of the mother balanced, to some degree, those otherwise pronounced paternal tendencies. Yet, apart from heredity, there was something distinctive about Edna Esbourne; something that was peculiarly the girl's own, which stamped her with an individuality quite different from the other members of the family. At the age of twenty she possessed a face and form of rare perfection in feature and mould. Her hair, of a raven black hue, was soft and glossy as the bird's coat; it waved over her temples and round her ears in silky ripples, or clung about the nape of the neck in tiny curls, contrasting with the ivory whiteness of her skin. Her cheeks and lips were tinted with nature's carmine, that deepened when she was excited or animated, which was frequently, for Edna Esbourne was a born enthusiast; one who felt deeply and spoke feelingly, even fearlessly, upon every subject that appealed to her keen sensibilities.

In figure she was tall and in bearing stately. Her well-poised head rose from finely moulded shoulders, and rounded throat, and was carried with a queenly air as of one who knew her own inherent powers. Yet despite these advantages of a fine personality, Edna was never arrogant or over-bearing in speech or manner; her mind was too broad, and her soul too large for such vanities. Her chief feature of character was that she appeared conscious of her own individuality, and scorned to act, live, think or speak beneath that conception of herself, and though she often fell

short of her high aims, she strove ever to reach her ideals in all things.

The chief personal charm of this woman lay in her mystic eyes. They were, in fact, the windows through which a great soul gazed out upon the objective world of shapes among which she dwelt for a season, while gaining greater knowledge through experience. They were eyes that are seldom seen in the face of a human being: weirdly lovely, not wholly because of their perfection of shape and color—though in this respect too they were exceptional, being large and full orbéd, and in hue of the deepest violet, though there were times when they would unhesitatingly have been described as velvety black. When in repose or in concentrated thought, the iris would contract and the color change to deepest blue with tiny flecks of darkest brown floating like miniature ships upon a deep blue sea. Again, when the girl was tender and sympathetic in mood and filled with sweetest womanly impulses—when her heart was ruling her wholly—then her wonderful eyes became so changed in hue that the brown flecks predominated and the whole effect was altered to such a degree and in such a marvellous manner, that it would have been thought the woman could change her eyes at will and wear them to suit her moods and tenses of mind, as she might don a hat to match a gown.

Their charm above all however lay in the mystic expression which stole into their deep, dark depths. It was as if ever-changing pictures were being traced on their discs, and the more you gazed into them the more mysterious they appeared, even at times suggesting to an ultra-imaginative mind the weird idea that a suffering soul was held captive behind those blue-brown windows, and occasionally peeped out through the portals with a wistful furtive gaze, or else made strange signs that might be interpreted as its but imperfectly expressed pleadings to be free. Such eyes as were those of Edna Esbourne's immediately arrested the attention of the beholder, and were instru-

mental in attracting others to her, and holding them by a strange power that was inseparable from her even when but a girl.

What wonder that tragedy should mar the early life of such a remarkable woman? Before the dark cloud fell upon her, Edna Esbourne was the light and joy of the household at "Cumbooquepa," beloved by all who knew her, brilliant, clever and altogether charming, while her life's outlook appeared bright and promising to an unusual degree; but experience became her teacher, and it was a hard task-master. Edna had to learn what she knew of life under his rule, and to her it was a bitter schooling. This, because it had been taught through her heart instead of her head, and the sufferings that teaching entailed left its mark upon the woman; a mark that was indelible and revealed the inner workings that had gone on beneath the surface; but the outer effects of which she learned to hide, for she did not reveal her scar to the eyes of the world. By stern self-discipline this woman had learned to hold her feelings and emotions in leash, and so concealed the ravages of that early blight—a blight that would easily have crushed a lesser soul, or have completely vanquished another woman with less force of character and individuality. That it left its mark upon her raven locks, turning them to a silvery diadem, was the only talisman that now remained to tell of the mental storms and heart agonies she had passed through during those dark days that fell upon her in life's spring-tide.

During the early years of her childhood Edna had been carefully trained by kind and loving parents. More especially had her mother's sweet counsels and tender admonitions influenced this peculiarly constituted and very high-spirited child. Then, while the father looked upon his bright and handsome daughter with pardonable paternal pride, and gloried in her dauntless spirit that knew no fear, he admired her strong will and courageous nature, and endeavoured to

mould out of these very excellent materials a well-developed and decided character which should harmonise with his daughter's other admirable traits and remarkable individual qualities. This he effected by the exercise of a discretionary firmness, which always commanded the respect and obedience of the child; and even when most stern in his manner towards her, Edna admired him all the more for the discipline to which he forced her to submit, although she sometimes rebelled at the time. Yet when once mastered through her reason, the girl was won. The father saw his own strong will accentuated in his eldest daughter, and strove to rectify the excess of this inherited trait, which he considered good in a man, though superfluous in a woman, and if not curbed would be likely to wreck her own peace and happiness in life. But it certainly needed a strong will and a wise yet loving hand to guide this young daughter over the quicksands of early life, and both parents used these invisible guiding reins well until she was about eighteen years of age, feeling sure that once she passed that critical period, the power that had worked through the child to excess would perhaps, if kept in the proper channel, be used to good purpose in the woman. These parents were wise enough to know that the same strength that makes a devil can evolve a god; the same love that causes a woman to sin, suffer and fall from virtue for the sake of its object, will also lead her to the arms of Christ. Mary Magdalene was the greatest sinner among all the women who ministered to Jesus, yet she alone was the first to behold the resurrected Life, and to hear the voice of her risen Lord.

In like manner the dreams of the mother and the hopes of the father might yet be amply fulfilled and eventually realized in this well beloved child—the first-born of their flock—who had come to bless their union just as the bells were ringing in Christmas morning—a very gift of God—and therefore consecrated to Him in the beginning of her young life.

They were not certain that they looked for anything definite, beyond perhaps the hope that this their daughter might yet be a very brilliant woman—a bright particular star in the firmament of women—but in what particular way they had never attempted to define. At that stage they were willing to await developments, yet later, when the development came, these parents were the very last to be pleased with the form it took.

Even as a child Edna Esbourne was an enthusiast, an idealist, and she invariably set her ideals so high that in striving to soar to their lofty elevations she frequently met with bitter discouragements and severe disappointments. If she clothed others in her idealistic fancies she found that few, very few, ever attained to the standard she demanded they should reach, and indeed they were frequently quite unconscious of the fact that she made the demand; and could therefore never quite understand in what respect they had failed, nor account for what seemed to them her great inconsistency—an inconsistency that clouded her otherwise admirable qualities of mind and heart as well as person. They were probably ignorant of the fact that inconsistency is inseparable from genius, being, as it undoubtedly is, a sign of growth; so that even inconsistency has its compensations. Edna was herself well aware of her failing (if such it were) and frequently tried to overcome it; but it was always at the cost of her mental and moral freedom. She learned that if she determined to grow, to ascend higher, she must get above and beyond all lesser growths, and that those who could not ascend with her must remain behind. This, too, must be done at the cost of allowing them to think her variable, changeable and thoroughly inconsistent. True, she was never quite satisfied with herself or her achievements; she frequently fell so far short of her aims, that when she climbed more determinately than ever before to what she imagined was a giddy height in her path of idealistic progress towards perfection, mental or moral, she

generally discovered that she had but climbed a spur of her mountain of thought, and had in reality a very long road yet to traverse before she should reach the summit, which soared above her, enshrouded in the clouds of mystery. This discovery often necessitated what seemed to her a retrograde step, or a descent into the valley of materiality, to enable her to set out again for the next mountain top beyond. Then the valley was dark and gloomy, and at times a terrible depression would overtake this ardent soul and bring upon it seasons of doubt and despondency, thus making her subject to moods and tenses that were most difficult to understand. But after a time these shadows would melt away as suddenly as they had appeared, and then for a time all would be gladness and joy. During these seasons she seemed as it were to see the light on the hill-top from amid the mists that clothed it; then immediately she would begin to climb again with fresh ardour and renewed vigor, remembering that the valley through which she was then passing was in reality higher than the hilltop she had left behind, and a step farther on in her journey to her coveted goal.

But what was the goal that this woman was seeking? In truth she knew not then. Had you asked her at that early period of her existence why she wasted so much energy upon what was to all intents and purposes a myth to her, and to all those who were connected with her, who watched her persistent efforts at improvement and moral and spiritual flagellations of herself, she could not have defined it in words. She might have said it was happiness! But even then that was vague, since she would have had to admit that she lacked little then that might have reasonably conduced to her happiness, as the world understands the meaning of the word.

No! It was something else. It was the unsatisfied yearning of a strong and growing soul to discover its as yet unknown self—its divine self—to find its One Source and be united thereto for ever.

And it is this same unsatisfied longing that is agitating the whole world to-day ; that is the cause of this great unrest among men and women ; among rulers and kings ; nations and kingdoms throughout the whole earth. It is the end of the world that was, and the beginning of the world that is to come. The time is now ripe when the prophecy of the Apocalypse shall be fulfilled and that " the Kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdom of the Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign for ever and ever."

This remarkable woman was but experiencing as an individual soul what all souls are subjected to collectively, though on different planes of consciousness, according to their development, and thus the " whole world groaneth and travaileth together " to bring forth from within, the perfection which must be revealed without, before the great Cosmic Plan of the universe can be unfolded (for man is in a state of becoming till the Christ be born in all humanity), and the hidden God be seen seated on His throne of glory in the unveiled soul of MAN. It is the unveiling of God in man, individually, collectively and universally, that is taking place to-day, and when the veil of the temple (the coats of skin or flesh that hide the Spirit) is rent in twain, then the Son of Man dies for all time, that the Son of God may live eternally and reign for ever. Then shall the voice of the last angel say with a loud voice that every nation of the earth shall hear and understand : " It is Finished ! "

Edna Esbourne experienced this state of soul unrest up till her twenty-seventh year, when the illumination of her life burst upon her, and the longing soul that peered through those strangely mystical eyes was released to know no longer the imprisonment of suffering and sorrow. It was not through bodily death that this came to the woman, but through a mental, moral and spiritual burial and resurrection. Rising from the dead of sense-consciousness, her soul was lifted out of its prison-house of rock and let free to soar through the

empyrean of spirit, where it knew its own power and glory and realized its immortality that could press on yet higher till it attained once more its own glorious Kingdom of Life Eternal !

CHAPTER II.

“THE TOOL THAT SHAPED IT.”

“What a mystery it is that the happiness, the light of one life should be so often in the gift of another’s will. Which of us is there that does not hold chords that may vibrate from the very heart of those around us ?”

—MISS THACKERAY.

As a girl, Edna Esbourne had very pronounced literary talents, and wrote a number of short sketches, poems and storyettes, some of which she had the good fortune to see published in the local papers and weekly journals, under the *nom-de-plume* of “Australian.” This gave her ardent and eager mind great encouragement and lent it fresh impetus, so that she conceived the idea of some day being known as a successful authoress.

About this time she was being ardently wooed by the son of a neighboring squatter, an old friend of her father’s, Mr. Fred Mostyn, the owner of “Warri-moo” Station, about nine miles distant from “Cum-booqueepa.” His eldest son Sidney was three years older than Edna. They had grown up together from childhood and had always called each other sweethearts. To him Edna used to write the usual effusions of youth, and it was in this way she discovered her power to express herself through her pen ; so that at length her letters and poetic effusions grew to be more like essays and philosophical dissertations than mere love-letters. But this did not lessen their charm for Sidney Mostyn so long as they were from his adored Edna, and he read and re-read them till he knew them almost by heart. To her they but served as a means for expressing the many strange thoughts that thronged and

surged through her highly-imaginative brain, though her heart had no part in the writing of them. She only needed to have the demand made upon her, and the supply flowed forth freely and generously. Sidney made this demand; her mind answered with the supply.

When Sidney Mostyn was but twenty-two years old he asked Mr. Esbourne for his permission to wed Edna. This the squatter most readily gave, for he felt gratified that the two families and the adjoining holdings should be thus united, so he bade the young man good-speed in his wooing and welcomed him as a prospective son-in-law. But deep was Sidney's grief to learn, when he asked Edna, in all seriousness, to be his wife, that she did not love him. "She did not love him," she said, "as she considered a husband should be loved; she only felt the same affection for him as for his or her own brothers, therefore she could never be his wife." She told him this kindly, but with all her old dashing spirit and impulsive manner, so that the young man felt she meant it and would never retract her words or alter her decision. He knew from that evening that his fate was sealed. This blow so affected young Mostyn that he was found the following morning in the bush near "Cum-booquepa" homestead, with a bullet from his own rifle through his heart. A bundle of Edna's letters and her photo were clasped in his left hand, with a few lines scrawled on the back in his own handwriting, requesting that these tokens might be buried with him. He had loved her dearly in life and would love her in death; but he could not live to see her the wife of another man.

Edna Esbourne was quite prostrated by the discovery of this awful tragedy and for a time was confined to her bed from shock to her highly strung nerves. When she recovered sufficiently to be about again, a strange melancholy settled upon her, and she did not seem to regain her usual strength and vivacity,

but spent her time mostly writing morbid and melancholy poetry which was exceedingly unhealthy for a nature such as hers. Her parents then thought it advisable to send her away for a change, the doctors recommending a sea voyage. She therefore went on a lengthy visit to Mr. and Mrs. Gordon-Browne—very old friends of her mother—who lived in Perth, Western Australia. It was here that she met one whose influence left a strong impression upon all her after-life, an influence which changed the currents thereof, and, though it did not seem to be so at the time, was the main factor in lifting her to the high spiritual plane she eventually reached.

Mr. Gordon-Browne was a wealthy and highly respected stock-broker in the city, and the family held a very good social position. There were two grown-up daughters, both of whom moved in society, and one son, a young man about twenty-three, who was employed in his father's office. They owned a handsome house surrounded by well kept grounds and commanding a fine view of Perth Water at its junction with the Swan and Canning Rivers ; while on the right rose the bold headland of Mount Eliza. Here the Gordon-Brownes entertained largely and kept open house for their wide circle of friends, so that during the season they were plunged into a constant round of gaieties, to which Edna Esbourne was most warmly welcomed, courted, and feted right royally. All the young people vied with each other to do her honor, and she soon became the centre of an admiring group, most of whom were already over head and ears in love with this very lovely girl from the eastern colonies. But Edna's recent experience made her very diffident about encouraging the attentions of any of the men she met in Perth just then, and she by no means showed herself eager to be wooed or won. This attitude naturally lent keener zest to some of her admirers. Among them was one man, who from the first had awakened a stronger interest in Edna than any other

man she had yet met, and, though she knew it not then, he was her fate.

Reginald Eugene Vernon was a man of remarkable personal attractions, and even the most prejudiced of his acquaintances or friends would be forced to admit that he was undeniably handsome in face and figure. He was tall and erect in bearing and of fine physical proportions, bright, energetic, quick of speech and glance, and, when it suited him, most impressive in manner and tone. He carried himself with an air of assurance—a *sang froid* that was quite irresistible—that even those who had reason to distrust him found themselves listening to his cultured voice and convincing speech with interest and pleasure, for he was highly intellectual and possessed a fund of general information upon most subjects, especially such as had any bearing upon the leading topics of the day or affected the trend of their own times. On politics and law he was almost an authority, and on such occasions he could voice his opinions so that they could not fail to carry conviction to his hearers, and even though they did not always agree with him they were fain to confess that his premises were sound and his arguments based upon facts, a knowledge of which he certainly possessed regarding any subject he discussed. His reasoning and deductive powers were very high and his views always logical. This particular bent of mind was, however, mainly due to his early education and training. As a young man he had studied for the Bar, passed his examinations, and taken his degrees, reaching the pinnacle of success in his profession at the early age of twenty-two.

Reg. Vernon (as he was familiarly called) was a native of New Zealand. His father was a well-to-do wine and spirit merchant in that colony—a man highly respected: the only son of a fine old English family, whose line ended in this voluntary exile, he having married an Italian lady of good birth and emigrated to the colonies in the early sixties. Reginald Eugene was their only son, and they had one daughter

younger. The young man, after attaining his position at the New Zealand Bar, built up a lucrative practice in his own town, and began to look round for fresh fields to conquer. He conceived a desire for travel, and with this end in view took a partner, and left for Europe on a protracted tour. He travelled for two years; spent another year in England with his father's relatives; tasted all the pleasures and dissipations of London and Paris till he had spent his own and a great deal of his father's money, and then returned home rather hurriedly, absolutely "broke." After the surfeit he had had of life as it is lived in those cities of great wealth, he felt no inclination to start the humdrum round of life and work, with the mere apologies for gaiety which his own small colonial township afforded. For a short time he tried to show his home friends how to go the pace, but he only succeeded in making the little place too hot for himself. At that time the Coolgardie Goldfields opening out in Western Australia, the gold fever proved irresistible to the innate gambling spirit of the young man—a taste of the gratification of which he had already experienced to his cost at Monte Carlo during his travels. He sold his business to his partner on the toss of a sovereign to settle the price, and left his island home for the Australian continent. He had intended to practise as a solicitor in Perth, perhaps getting the legal business of the big mining companies then being formed but he found on arrival that there was no reciprocity between the New Zealand and Western Australian Governments in respect to admission of solicitors to practise there without first passing the local examinations. This Reg. Vernon refused to do, and as he was then able to make a good deal of money in share dealing, he let his legal aspirations slide and went in for mining speculations pure and simple. For about five years he drifted round the goldfields and the capital; meeting with phenomenal luck in all his deals, till at the period when we meet him he had just

disposed of one of his "shows," or mining leases, to a London syndicate for £30,000 cash, and had also acquired a goodly parcel of shares in the new company.

As a boy Reginald Eugene Vernon had been a remarkable character. At a very early age he showed signs of a most ungovernable temper, exceptionally strong will, fiery passions and a reckless disregard for authority; associated with an intrepidity and daring that fell little short of insanity. So contrary and so perverse was his disposition that, although a mere child, he could never rest until he had done the very thing that his parents forbade him to do. At school and college he was the despair of tutors, masters and professors. He violated every rule just for the pure love of doing so, and, on several occasions, so glaring were his deeds of defiance, that he would have been expelled but for the influence of his father which saved him from that life-long disgrace. In every phase of life this unruly spirit prevailed, and often marred his own life's harmony as well as that of all connected with him. But he never allowed that anything could make or blight his peace and happiness, since he prided himself upon his absolute indifference to everything and the opinions of everyone. He boasted of a stoical philosophy of thought and action in regard to life with its good or ill, although so far as he was concerned, it had given him all good and only the ill he made for himself. If a thing came to him he took it as his just due; if he failed to achieve his ends after using all the finesse he knew, then he likewise submitted to his fate; though in this latter respect he was somewhat of a contradiction, for the fighting element was so strongly paramount in his character, that the very difficulties which would daunt another in the pursuit of a certain end or goal only made Reginald Eugene Vernon the more determined to win it. He hated defeat of any kind whatsoever, and though he was naturally lazy and indolent at school, he so intensely disliked being behind in anything that others could achieve or attain to, that at examination

time he took everything before him, always coming out with the highest honors. This was still more remarkable, as it was known that he scarcely studied, but idled away the term in sports or pastimes till within a few weeks of the coming exam., then with a desperate spurt he would apply himself to his books and cram with a determination and will that was characteristic of this strangely ill-regulated character. He invariably won what he aimed at, taking the much coveted honors from those who had plodded and striven for them through long days and nights of close study and steady application, while he had been enjoying himself in field or on river. This spirit of rivalry ruled the man still more completely as he grew older, and became more pronounced in regard to his sensuous desires and social pleasures. Whatever he wanted he would have, even at the cost of the misery or ruin of many. He would raise heaven and earth to get his own way, and this imperious will and his strange magnetic charm of personality and manner, generally won him his desires. He gambled because he desired to try his skill over his fellow men, and more often won than lost ; he fought them over a difference to test the power of his nerve and muscle, and though often badly mauled he was never beaten, for he would have been torn limb from limb before he would give in or allow another to claim the victory over him. He drank because he desired to do what others did : the class of men whom he had chosen to emulate were a fast and reckless set, and in this, too, he was not content with mediocrity, but indulged to an extent that was phenomenal for a man so young. He could drink deeper and more continuously than any of his acquaintances of club or tap-room. Stronger and more robust men had to drop out of his company, for they felt it was impossible to keep the pace with one who went to such extremes, without ending in the madhouse. He did this not altogether from love of the drink or the company, but more from a

dare-devil recklessness of consequences and utter disregard for his own constitution or the opinions of others. In like manner he raced horses because it was the custom of fast men to be connected with the turf; and, with an energy worthy of a better cause, threw himself wholly and entirely into everything that chanced to interest him for the time. Once the craze had worn off, he threw them all aside one after the other and sought new sensations. Women always had, more or less, a place in his life, though he was much more inclined for men's society. Yet because it was also the correct thing to do (or so he opined at that period of his wild-oat sowing) he spent much of his substance upon a class of women who were not loth to welcome his handsome face and debonair style at all times and seasons whenever he chose to favor them with his company.

Reginald Vernon had a peculiar penchant for beautiful women; only beauty counted with him; never mind how frail it might be. He also must own that beauty solely. He must call it his own while he desired to possess it, and when he was weary of it, well, anyone could have it for all he cared, only he did not want to be further troubled over the matter. He was a past-master in the art of wooing for he could fit his moods and tastes to the style and demands of the one on whom his fancy fastened. Very few women were able to resist him once he set himself to win their regard, and he, unfortunately, left many broken and soiled lilies lying bruised by the wayside in his reckless search after pleasure. Like all other things in his life, as soon as he had obtained possession of them, and knew the extent of his power over them, he no longer took any pleasure in their society; it was not the individual he desired, but the sense of ownership for the time, and, that gratified, they were no longer valued, but listlessly tossed aside for something new. Just as he gave away to all and any, his easily won trophies at tennis, football or other like sports, so he treated the fair sex who were weak

enough to believe his protestations of love. Marriage he had always avoided because it would entail a certain amount of responsibility and restraint, which he was neither ready nor willing to assume.

Reginald Eugene Vernon was among the gay coterie of young men who formed the circle of admirers of Mr. Gordon-Browne's two handsome daughters, Cora and Brenda, and their beautiful young friend from the east. From the first moment that Reginald Vernon beheld Edna Esbourne, her fresh sparkling beauty took him by storm, and he determined to make a conquest of her heart. He had never seen any woman to equal her, especially as just at the time he first met her she was looking her bright vivacious self again. He considered that he now had but one ambition left in life, and that was to possess this lovely creature solely for himself, even if it cost him his freedom.

Edna was instantly attracted by his strong personality, and a strange fascination, which was to her unaccountable, took possession of her when in this man's presence. Like herself he was dark complexioned, but he had the olive tint of the south, and his features were of Italian cast; in fact, he could claim descent from that warm-blooded southern race on his mother's side, whom he greatly favored. He had jet black hair and moustache, the former soft and curling; the latter silky and well-trimmed, drooping over a mouth that was beautifully shaped; and when he smiled he revealed small even teeth behind full red lips. His eyes were deep set, dark brown in color, but wont to change to a murky black when anger smouldered in their depths, like a lowering storm-cloud before it bursts in all its fury; or again they would scintillate like stars and emit flashes of light from beneath the long black lashes, that generally veiled them when this mood ruled the man. At these times his sensuous, passionate nature was in the ascendant, and few were able to stand against his seductive wiles. Other times there

lurked in those eyes a sinister gleam, that was like glint of steel through a very small crevice ; at such moments the shape of the eyes changed and seemed to become long and narrow, and the pupils would contract till they appeared to be but the size of a pin-point of light. This queer effect conveyed a most unpleasant sensation to an onlooker. It appeared as though he could hold the gaze and command the attention of anyone he wished to impress at such a time and so mould them to his will. It was something like the fascination of the serpent over the bird, and in truth there was a strong suggestion of hypnotic power of a rather Mephistophelean character lurking behind those peculiar eyes. Such was the man who had this power and was able to use it to her own undoing, upon a woman who possessed great magnetic powers herself, but of a very different order !

It was not his wealth or position nor his claim to manly beauty of face or form that attracted Edna Esbourne to Eugene Vernon. It was the man himself that gripped her. Had he been a pauper with the same individuality he would still have won this most original woman's interest and so stormed the citadel of her heart. His strong determined character, his very daringness and forcefulness of purpose when he set himself to achieve his own ends, were some of his greatest charms for her. She admired his dash and fearlessness of consequences to actions whether good or bad, which, coupled with a certain recklessness and Bohemianism, appealed to her strange nature and tastes, which were strongly democratic and even iconoclastic in regard to set rules and social usages or customs. From the first hour of their acquaintance Edna believed him to be her ideal man ; the man above all others to whom her proud spirit would be willing to render homage ; a man who could command her love and respect, and yet rule her without lowering her own sense of what she demanded as an individual soul. She invested him with attributes he never really possessed ; saw qualities in him which no one else ever

detected ; made an idol of him, and straightway fell down in worship at his feet ; in short, set him upon such an ideal pedestal of perfection that it was quite impossible for a man like him ever in reality to aspire to, much less reach. But then Edna Esbourne was an extremist as well as an idealist. What wonder that in a world of realism she should meet with disillusionment and dire disappointment ?

It was Edna's last evening in Perth. The P. and O. mail boat would be calling at Albany on her way to the east, and Edna was returning by it, much to the regret of a numerous circle of friends whom she had made during her three months' stay in the west. As she and Eugene Vernon strolled alone together on the front terrace of "Swanleigh," her heart was filled with regret, for her visit had been a very enjoyable one indeed. The night was mild and warm ; a full moon was bathing the river in silvery brightness and throwing the shadow of Mount Eliza clearly outlined upon its bright surface. From where they stood the scene was glorious, yet on this particular night neither of these two beholders could see its beauty. They were absorbed in each other, and gazed into the strange depths of each other's eyes, each trying to fathom the other's heart in his and her own particular way. For about half an hour they had strolled up and down the long terrace, when Edna suddenly paused and rested her arm against the pedestal of a statue of Winter, which was one of a pair that adorned the foot of the wide steps leading up to the front of the house. She had been talking upon one of her favorite topics, and had for the moment waxed eloquent and become absorbed in her subject to the exclusion of her companion. Edna had numerous pet theories upon life and morals which she did not hesitate to air freely when she got a sympathetic listener, like the man who stood by her side to-night. They had had many interesting discussions since they first met ; and he thoroughly enjoyed drawing her out, and then criticising her views or opinions ; yet he

really considered the former outlandish, and the latter crude. It however amused him to listen and watch the rapid change of expression on her mobile face, and to see the lights and shadows play at hide and seek in those mystical eyes. He wondered what she would look like when thrilled by the force of a great passion. What a woman she would be! What a superb, aye, what a glorious creature! Long ago he had formed the resolve that he alone should be the man to call that passion into being; to awaken the slumbering fires of love in the depths of that woman's soul: to see those dark orbs, now flashing with enthusiasm, grow soft and languorous and then burn with the intensity of desire. He had waited and played his cards in a most diplomatic manner with this one object in view—to possess Edna Esbourne for his own. To his mind she was the only woman worth calling his own—worth giving his name to; yet, though she was so lovely, he considered she just needed the one touch to make her perfect—she required awakening. This night he was resolved that she should respond to his touch and voice as Galatea did to Pygmalion.

For several minutes he stood listening but not hearing what she was saying, and watched her as she leaned against the white stone column within reach of his hand. Her beautiful face and wondrous eyes turned from him and gazed across the moonlit waters, her soft white throat and bosom rising and falling under the diaphonous chiffon of her pale heliotrope robe, which suited to perfection her dark beauty and pale tinted skin. Her coils of glossy hair were gathered high upon her shapely head and were partially veiled by a light lace scarf carelessly thrown over one shoulder. It was a hot summer's evening, and the rounded arms and shapely hands were clearly outlined as they gleamed white as alabaster in the moonlight. Eugene Vernon was a connoisseur of female beauty, so there was not one detail that escaped his critical eye—yes, the girl was a living picture. Every pulse in the man's body thrilled with a sensuous de-

light, a joy that was part of his nature, and which he lived but to gratify; anything that failed in that respect he had no further use for. But with this woman near him he experienced the very quintessence of pleasure; he had never known such a keen sensation of intense feeling, such a rejuvenation of his youthful ardour as this, with which her very presence filled him. He was overpowered by it, and at last yielded to its demands. He must try his power and learn his fate from those lovely lips!

With a sudden movement he had stepped in front of her where she still stood leaning against the statue, and, facing her, placed both hands upon her shoulders while he gazed into her eyes and said in a half-whisper:

“Edna, look at me!”

With a gesture of surprise she lifted her eyes to meet his, and, as she faced him, beheld that peculiar droop of the eyelids and scintillating gleam which flashed from his dark orbs when that strange hypnotic gaze was centred upon an object that he wished to mould to his own purpose or work his will upon. Before she had time to answer he added in abrupt yet low and intense tones:

“Edna Esbourne, you must be my wife!”

A gasp, a quick start from her—and then, not waiting for her answer, he reiterated:

“Yes, Edna, my wife—my wife, or we must part for ever after to-night. There can be no middle course for you and me.”

“Mr. Vernon, do you—do you really know what you are saying?” was all Edna could find words to stammer, so great was her surprise—not at his words but the manner of them! It was certainly characteristic of this strange man, and she really liked him the more for the novelty of the wooing, the daringness of the proposal.

“Know what I am saying?” he repeated, hoarsely. “My God! Yes, I do! It is you who do not know—who cannot conceive the power of the love that is burning into my very soul—has done ever since I

first saw you. If you did, you would not need me to tell you that I love you, love you madly, passionately ! ”

He paused, and as he spoke his fingers tightened their grasp upon her shoulders till she could have cried out in pain, but she only quivered beneath their firm grip. Then—then a deep, strong, new sensation pulsed through her whole being from head to foot—made her tremble in his grasp, while there flashed into those glorious eyes that met his a light that he had longed to see burning there—a light which *he* had called into life, the fire of a strong passion, and *he* called it the light of love.!

“ Edna ! Edna ! You love me ! I know it—I see it in your eyes ! Look into mine and tell me so ! Say it now ! ”

But he gave her no time to form the words that fluttered on her lips ; catching her in his arms he held her to his breast in a wildly passionate embrace and showered kisses on her face, hair, neck, and bosom ; and again and again lifted her eyes on a level with his own that he might gaze into those expressive depths of the woman's soul, revelling in the madness of his delight at seeing there the effect upon her of this awakening. Then he watched her lashes droop shyly and veil their light, while her cheeks flushed a rosy carmine as he made her whisper over and over again :

“ I love you ! I love you ! Eugene, I love you ! ”

Thus was Edna Beulah Esbourne wooed and won.

CHAPTER III.

PURIFIED BY SUFFERING.

After her visit to Perth and the events which transpired there, Edna Esbourne came back to her father's house a changed creature. She had been transformed from a child to a woman through this new love-life that had come to her so suddenly. The story was told. The parents, knowing their daughter's

disposition, were wise enough not to oppose the engagement, though they stipulated that it should be of two years' duration, and that the man who had won their daughter's heart without their consent should come over on a visit to "Cumbooquepa" as soon as his business affairs would permit, so that the parents might meet this prospective son-in-law. This arrangement suited Edna for the time, but the length of the engagement by no means pleased Eugene Vernon, and he was fully determined to have possession of his bride within six months. Mr. and Mrs. Esbourne did not know the character of the man who had so daringly laid siege to their daughter's heart, nor that he had a will even superior to hers.

It was, therefore, only about a couple of months after Edna's return that a wire arrived from Eugene Vernon, announcing his intention of accepting their invitation to pay a visit to the home of his betrothed. Shortly afterwards he arrived. His coming caused a wondrous change in Edna; she was in a state of eager, nervous expectancy till the hour of his arrival. Then the meeting between the lovers convinced all who saw them that the impulsive passionate girl had given this man her whole heart's worship and deepest adoration—a worship such as she might have given to one of the most cherished idols of her soul, or her lost saints of childhood's days. To a nature and temperament like hers this was a most serious state of mind, for she was so intense over everything she took up that when it came to the birth of love in the heart of the girl it filled her whole being, and she was swayed like a reed in the wind by the force of this mighty tempest of passion. She found her heart so caught in the web of infatuation, which her lover had spread around her, that she yielded herself wholly to the demands of his strong self-assertive character that seemed to beat down all opposition and carry everything before him.

When Eugene Vernon arrived at "Cumbooquepa" he came with the fixed determination of

winning the squatter's consent to his marriage with Edna at once. He pleaded that recent developments in the mining properties in which he was interested would mean a great deal of money to him and, in all probability, necessitate his taking a trip to England to meet the London board of directors for whom he acted as attorney. He wanted to take his bride with him, and as Mr. Esbourne could find no serious objections to the proposal he was completely overruled and gave his consent to the marriage.

Mr. Esbourne was not altogether favorably impressed with Eugene Vernon as a husband for his daughter. He would have preferred someone more serious, sedate and less assertive for his high-spirited Edna. She, who was so full of life and vitality in herself, would be like flint to steel with a nature like his. She required a steadying influence, a firm yet gentle, loving and reliable character in the man who should be her partner, to balance her own rather impulsive and excitable temperament. He considered the pair were a splendid match physically, but, like a pair of thoroughbred horses, until they are broken in, though they might look well in harness, they were not likely to be very trustworthy, for if one took fright or became restive the other would scarcely have the self-control to avoid a smash or collision. For these reasons he hesitated, after seeing Eugene Vernon, before he would give his consent to the union at such short notice and before they had had time to know each other better. He, however, had the weight of the influence of the whole household against him (except Grace, who never liked her sister's lover from first sight), for the family at the homestead were favorably impressed with Edna's fiancé. Even Mrs. Esbourne did not see anything to object to in Mr. Vernon; he was handsome, rich, well-born, had a good position, and was apparently as deeply in love with Edna as she was with him. What more could any parent ask for? Yes, he might be a little wild, but then he would settle down when they were married,

and of course Edna would be a restraining influence upon him, for the girl herself had completely changed since she met him. All her old brooding melancholy had disappeared; the bloom had returned to her cheeks; the light to her eyes; and she was her old bright self again. Indeed in the eyes of her parents she was as one transformed and more like a magnetized being than an ordinary girl. Thus they realised that to refuse their consent to her early marriage with the man of her choice would do more harm than good. It was life, change, excitement that Edna required; she would never again settle down to the quiet, even existence of their home-life after having once tasted the delights of social life in a city and become intoxicated with the passionate overpowering love of a man like Reginald Eugene Vernon.

No! They reluctantly confessed to each other, their daughter was no longer their own, though they might still possess her by refusing to yield her to a comparative stranger, who had in a few short months so won her allegiance that the love and care of a lifetime was completely forgotten in the new tie, or only took a secondary place; but that which they would hold would not be their Edna—their child as they knew her—but only the shadow of herself, the substance was already the property of another. This is the inevitable law that rules the world—the early love of parents and home has to be merged into the larger love of husband and children. It is a constant progression; a growing out of and leaving behind; and as the beautiful flower is sacrificed for the fruit, so is the love of those who have nurtured and fostered our early life and ministered unto us in our days of helplessness, sacrificed for the joys of a freer existence, a more expansive life. Then we in turn pass through the same experience ourselves, and we too learn the meaning of the pangs which it cost others to part with us, when we in our onward ascent have to give up our dearest and best to higher and holier claims. Thus life, through

continuous sacrifice, evolves from life in death ; and all is growth, growth, GROWTH !

So Edna Beulah Esbourne was married to Reginald Eugene Vernon on a bright day early in June, and bade a tearful farewell to her girlhood's happy home and all her loved ones there, to go forth into a strange new life with her newly-wedded husband, and taste the first draught of the cup of her life's experience. But she little guessed how its flavor would change, and that she would drain the last drops to the bitter dregs.

Upon their arrival in Perth, Eugene Vernon did not go to England, but established his bride in a very beautiful home at Claremont—a fashionable suburb at that time—furnished it lavishly and threw open his house to all his old friends and many new ones, for Edna was warmly welcomed back to Perth by all whom she had known during her visit there, and many more rejoiced that she, being such an acquisition to their social circles, had come to settle among them. A few secretly considered that she was far too fine a woman to have thrown herself away on a man with a reputation such as Reg. Vernon was known to have ; but these were chiefly men, who knew the inner running of his life. Only a few, a very few women of their own set knew anything derogatory to Vernon's character, and they were the very last to whisper it abroad. For quite six months or more, contrary to the predictions of his familiar friends, Eugene Vernon succeeded in proving himself a tolerably good husband, and, as far as any could disprove, he was also a faithful one. Evidently Edna's charms had caught and held fast his wandering fancy. It was the winter season when they returned to Perth, and, as heavy rains were prevailing, Eugene spent most of his evenings at home in his bride's company. He absorbed her entirely ; he could not bear her out of his sight, and when not at home he would wire her to come up to town, meet him and dine at " The Palace," and then on to

the theatre, or spend the evening at the house of one of their many friends. This lasted while the novelty was strong enough to charm Vernon, but even the delights of possessing a lovely young bride palled upon him, and he was one that liked his pleasures sandwiched. He had not given up his club friends, of course, for it was difficult for a man such as he to relinquish his long acquired bachelor habits, and the free and easy ways that he had acquired during years of life on the goldfields.

There came a time when Edna's health was such as to make these little outings rather a strain upon her, so she spent more of her time at home. Then Eugene began to be late for dinner, or perhaps he would send a wire telling her not to wait as he would be late, or he had some business that would keep him. These and other like excuses became daily more frequent, and on such occasions she was generally left alone; their residence being out of town her friends could not drop in as they might have done had she been living in the city. These evenings hung heavily upon Edna's hands, for she had lost her old interest in her writing and the books she had formerly loved now failed to afford any pleasure. She was absorbed by one thing only—her husband and her love for him. She lived but for him, and his companionship was to her the breath of her life. His presence still filled her with that same intense joy that was born in her heart the night he bade her be his wife. From that memorable night Edna had set out on a long journey and the goal was the development of her character; but she had many hard and severe lessons to learn and many sad and bitter experiences were necessary to bring forth the hidden powers which lay dormant in that strong soul. She had yet to learn that no sorrow is for sorrow's sake alone; it is to develop the powers of the growing soul. When we thoughtlessly sow the seeds of error in the fields of life we alone must reap it, for the harvest is ours and

the yield is the same whether it was done in ignorance of the effect or by deliberate wrongdoing on our part. Then when the suffering comes we know we are being put through God's threshing machine, that the wheat may be separated from the chaff. Sometimes we find when the pains and pangs are over that there was more good grain in our field than we anticipated, so that the treatment was beneficial. But not one stroke could have been spared, not one blow of the flail avoided, else we should not have been made thus pure, earnest and strong to bear and to do, and fit us for the better ministry to others when under similar chastisement. But it is the petty trials, the daily wearing sacrifice that tests us, and this always weighs full measure in God's scales.

This was now being demanded from Edna Vernon. Already she was feeling a want; a something lacking in her life; a missing drop of sweetness in her apparently overflowing cup of joy. Oh! was the first golden glow of her happiness fading so soon? Here she must sit alone in silence, for there was none to whom she could open her heart nor turn to for advice and sympathy. Even were it so she did not quite know why she needed comfort. None would consider that the bride of little more than a twelvemonth, with all the elegances of wealth and refinement around her and plenty of money for all her needs, should require pity or sympathy! Yet deep in her heart Edna Vernon was suffering. True, Eugene was still kind and loving in word and action towards her when they were together, but he gave her so little of his company; especially now, when she felt she most needed it. Oh! how she hated those long weary hours of waiting alone when he did not come at the promised time. She waited, watched and listened hour after hour, till her very body ached with the strain. She only had one tender, sweet hope ahead—the delightful anticipation of something to love that would be all her own, her very own, heart of her heart—something that would not leave nor grieve her ever. This one

hope kept her up and cheered her during those long, solitary days and nights, for her husband's daily absences were more frequent and prolonged. She had coaxed, expostulated, entreated and pleaded with tears that he would not leave her so much alone, but though he sometimes promised faithfully that he would come early in future he invariably broke his promises, so now she had come to that heart-sickening stage in a wife's experiences when she knew she could not place any reliance upon her husband's word. To Edna this was an intense disappointment; she was so powerless to alter anything in her present condition; so entirely at his mercy for everything—even a caress. Her cheerfulness was fast disappearing and a settled melancholy was stealing over her, till she would sit and sigh while the tears stole quietly down her pale cheeks and made her such a contrast to the bright vivacious girl of a year ago.

When she would upbraid Eugene for his absence and broken promises he would exclaim impatiently:—

“Why, my dear girl, you can't expect me to be always tied to your side. Why don't you go out and enjoy yourself among your friends and leave me to my own affairs? A man has occupations that demand his attention at late or early hours, and I at any rate will not be dictated to or questioned as to my goings or doings, so you may as well know that now as later, Edna.”

Then as a fresh burst of tears would greet such a retort from him, he would ejaculate angrily:—

“There now, that's a great inducement to keep a man with you, isn't it? A nice companion *you* are at present! You'd give a fellow the blues to come near you! I'll be precious glad when you're yourself again—perhaps you'll be more reasonable then. Anyway, I'll give you a chance to pull yourself together. I'm sick of this whining.”

With an oath he had left the room and banged the door behind him in such a way that her whole

being trembled from head to foot with the shock—such behaviour coming from him—from her Eugene. A fit of hysterical weeping followed his departure, for she was weary and her nerves were overstrung by the many conflicting emotions that were thronging through her heart at that time. She wanted to keep her husband by her side; she desired it with all the intensity of her being; but now—how was she to do it? She had heard and read of husbands drifting away from their wives, but never conceived it could be possible for hers to do so! But now the hateful fact that this would probably be her fate, stared her in the face. There was not a mood or tense that she had not tried lately to woo him back to his allegiance; in fact, she had been as variable as an April day; and each time they quarrelled she would vow she would be different next time; she would be quiet and gentle and yielding—anything to please him—anything to keep him with her.

This went on for several months, and so far the only tangible cause to grieve over was Eugene's late hours. He had never allowed her to see him drunk, nor had he remained away from her all night. But one day, after a more than usually fierce display of temper on his part, she had answered him very sharply and one word had given birth to another so that the first really serious quarrel took place between them. It had been avoided for so long chiefly because Edna's was such a lovable and sweet nature; but lately she had grown irritable and peevish at times, and Eugene Vernon had no patience with hysterical women. On this occasion he put aside his diplomacy and showed himself in his true colors, giving vent to his anger in a man's own special way—a good round swear—then threw himself out of the room and departed to seek more congenial companionship and scenes better suited to his tastes, leaving his weeping wife amazed beyond expression at such an unseemly outburst from him. She felt sure he would come back, however; he could not go to the city and leave her like

that, surely! Luncheon came, dinner-time passed, supper hour arrived, and still no Eugene. The evening hours crept slowly on and still he tarried, but Edna waited up, expecting to hear his footstep at any moment. Midnight passed and yet she was alone. Oh! how she was suffering! How those long hours of weary waiting for a well-known footstep dragged their slow moments along! How her ear was strained for every sound, listened eagerly, anxiously, hungrily for the click of the latch that should announce the end of that night's vigil. But no, the step that was heard in the distance passed by, and black despair seized upon her once again. Up and down, up and down the long room she paced with restless feet, and aching head; her eyes swollen and red from weeping, though now dry with the tears burning upon her smarting lids. She had wept till she could weep no more. She felt as if the fountains were exhausted at their source; only a hot parched feeling now took the place of those torrents that had flooded eyes, cheeks, hands and pillow during the early hours of her vigil. What a long time she seemed to have been watching for that one human being, the only one in all the world whose coming could bring her relief!

One—then two o'clock struck, but he had not come. What could be keeping him so late? Why was he tarrying so long? At first she imagined all sorts of reasons, allowed for all kinds of delays, made every possible excuse—all, everything except the bald and hateful truth which she would not look full in the face—the plain and naked fact that he did not want to come, but preferred to stay away; he was enjoying himself better where he was, indifferent to the pain he was causing her! He left her in anger, so he found more solace in the company of others than with her, his wife—his once adored Edna. Oh! what a stab this thought inflicted upon her loving, faithful heart, and she burst forth again into a passion of tears and moaned as she lay prostrate, her face buried in the sofa cushions:

“How can he treat me so? How can he leave

me so cruelly now when he knows he is all I have? Once he was always by my side, never absent like this; and was only happy when I was near him! Why do men change so? Love surely is not true love that cannot endure its hell as well as its heaven. But perhaps heaven is no longer heaven to him, *because he has been there!* ”

Then in the midst of her spoken soliloquy she heard again the sound of approaching footsteps and rushed eagerly to the window to watch for the coming of the loved one, eager to greet him and let him see she forgave everything and was only glad to have him with her. But again disappointment met her; it was someone else's loved one, not hers. Then with sinking heart Edna cried pitifully:

“ Oh! Why, why is it everyone else's husband comes home and only mine tarries? ”

“ Ah! this heartache, this pain, it is almost unbearable! ” She felt as if she must do something to ease it; something to help her forget. In desperation she plunged into the pages of a novel, but in a few minutes she threw it down impatiently, exclaiming:

“ Bah! the stupid stuff! The one who wrote it could never have known suffering like mine! ”

She then tried a piece of work, a delicate fabric for a tiny form; but the needle would not do anything except prick her fingers. Then in self pity for her woe, the tears—always so near the surface now—began to fall again in a silent shower over work and hands till all were blotted out, and she impatiently cast it aside. Weariness next came over her and with a sigh she rose, exclaiming:

“ I don't care; I'll not wait up any longer! I'll go to bed and let him see that I'm perfectly indifferent whether he comes or stays. He's not worth worrying over since he can treat me like this! ”

With nervous hurried movements she began to disrobe, fearing he would come in and find her still waiting, and she would have failed to carry out her role of assumed indifference. Presently she heard horses

feet; they came nearer and nearer the house. Yes, it was coming that way; it must be Eugene. Quickly she threw on a tea-gown, and, not wishing to let him see she had been anxious, she wiped away all trace of tears, ran to the mirror and dusted a little powder on her flushed face, and with a supreme effort to appear composed she picked up the discarded work and seated herself in an easy chair and awaited his coming. Nearer and nearer the cab rumbled and she fancied she saw him ready to spring out, full of apologies for keeping her waiting and with his hands full of presents of fruit or flowers for her as a peace-offering, as he entered the room looking so handsome and strong, her own beloved Eugene, her darling husband. No! she would not be angry with him; she would not scold nor cry; she would receive him quietly and affectionately, so he could see that she knew a wife's duty and could do it, even if he had again broken his promise to her. She was sure he would feel more regretful if she took it all calmly than if she upbraided him. Then with a gasp she exclaimed:

“ Oh, the cab has gone past ! ”

This was too much for her to bear calmly, and, letting the work fall to the carpet, she buried her face in the cushions and wept long and bitterly. Horrid demons of doubt then took possession of her and she imagined all sorts of things. Where was he? Oh! where was he? Was he unfaithful? O! could it be—No, no, of course not! What a wicked thing for her ever to think of in connection with *her* husband! She was wronging him cruelly—yes, doing him a great injustice in even harboring the thought for a moment.

Strange how every woman believes her own particular husband to be above suspicion—then stranger still where all the unfaithful ones come from! It is a pardonable vanity on the part of each and every wife to think that she at any rate can hold her husband's heart loyal to her while she so desires it. But it is a vanity that frequently receives a severe shock and

consequent disillusionment. "But," whispered the demon of doubt in poor Edna's ears, "where is he at this hour—nearly three o'clock? The hotels are all closed and what could keep him engaged so long into the night? Of course there was his club, and he might be playing cards or perhaps billiards, of which he was very fond.

"Oh, dear!" she cried, restlessly rising and pacing the floor once more, her hair all unbound and falling in a shower over neck and shoulders. "How I wish there were no clubs, no hotels, no cards, no billiards, to keep men out at night! The horrid places; they ought to be all burnt down! Why must men have these things to amuse them? They're surely bigger babies than we are. I almost wish I were a man just for one night that I might go and see where and how men amuse themselves when everyone else is asleep—except such waiting wives as myself."

Poor foolish Edna! It was well for her peace of mind just then that her wish could not be granted! One glance would have been quite sufficient to gratify her reckless desire to have one night out and get a glimpse of a modern man's life, where and how he spends his midnight hours! "Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise," the old maxim says. But when a girl like Edna Vernon had to lose that blissful ignorance and gain that coveted wisdom at such a cost and by such slow torture as she was then suffering, it is surely irony to apply the old saw to her case?

The clock had struck another hour and Edna mechanically counted the strokes—one, two, three—as she lay upon the bed in her wrapper, too restless and unnerved to sleep. Her heart sank within her breast till it felt like a shot bird that gave a spasmodic flutter now and then, and felt the pains and pangs of dissolution. Her thoughts were torture to her, and at length she could lie still no longer, so she rose and stood by the large bay window that overlooked the garden; it was very quiet outside; a pale moon, not long risen, shone, with a rather sickly light,

through the bank of grey clouds which hung on the eastern horizon and to the weary eyes of the watcher it looked as if even the moon was sympathising with her. Leaning her hot brow against the cool window pane, she stood there thinking in a listless, hopeless way that was most unhealthy for a young bride and prospective mother. But lately this state of settled melancholy was very pronounced in Edna Vernon, and she could not shake it off, try as she might. It was only when one of those hysterical outbursts made a change in her nervous system and cleared the air for a while that she was able to see any hope or brightness in her life. She had a feeling that she would die when her baby was born, and to-night this conviction was strengthened. Her husband always told her that she gave way too much to her feelings, and should endeavor to control her emotions, and that the more she yielded the worse she would be.

"But it's all very well for Eugene to talk; he's never been married before and cannot know what a woman suffers. How inconsiderate men are. It's one thing to have them as lovers and quite another to know them as husbands. Oh, dear! what a complex thing life is—especially married life. I ——."

She broke off suddenly as the rumble of an approaching cab in the distance smote upon her straining ears. The last train had gone long hours ago, so Eugene must come home in a cab. Looking down the street she saw the "hansom" bowl swiftly in the direction of the house and then stop a few yards from the gate.

"Yes, yes! It's Eugene at last," she exclaimed in a tone of relief. "But what a long time he is in getting out."

The cabman got down from his box and seemed to be helping him to alight. "He must be ill! Yes, he is ill; he can scarcely stand! Oh! my poor boy, how I have misjudged him!" With flying feet she ran downstairs and along the hall (the servants all being in bed), and before the cabman could get

his almost helpless burden up the steps, she had thrown wide the door and ran down to meet them, exclaiming :

" Eugene, darling ! What is the matter ? What ! you are ill ! Let me help you."

" It's all right, madam, he's all right, don't be alarmed," said the cabman, with an indulgent smile. " Just a little fresh, that's all—nothing worse."

" Yesh (hic) I'sh allsh rightsh (hic). Givsh yer handsh, wifesh (hic)," muttered Eugene, lurching against her as she caught him by the arm.

Then for a moment—just one awful moment—Edna, who had never seen anything like this before, looked closely into the face of her adored husband, and like a flash she realised what " fresh " meant : it was that Eugene was *drunk*—helplessly, horribly *drunk* ! She felt as if she wanted to run away and hide herself somewhere—to forget that it was true, and to awaken and find it only a hateful nightmare. But no, it was but too real—very, very real, as she was assured by the chill morning air and the voice of the cabman saying as he helped his fare up the steps and placed him on the hall seat :

" There now, you'll be all right, sir. Thank you, sir," as he took a piece of gold from Eugene's hand. Then with a respectful " Good-night, ma'am," to Edna, who stood by like one dazed, the man passed out and down the steps, closing the hall door behind him as he left.

Eugene sat sprawling on the hall seat, quite helpless, while Edna stood looking at this transformation of the man she loved—and married—the one creature in all the world upon whom she had showered a passionate devotion, almost amounting to worship. Was this her husband ? This helpless, idiotic-looking wreck of a man, with clothes crushed, hat crushed, linen soiled, and the countenance which she thought so noble, so handsome, revealing but too plainly the marks of dissipation ! She hated to look at him because she feared that the respect, love and worshipfu-

regard in which she had always held him—her idol—would now totter and fall at her feet in ruins and she would be crushed beneath the fragments.

It was not that the drink was in itself a crime ; it was the bitter humiliation ; the shock and the horrid feeling of disgust which came over her when she beheld him thus—when she went near him and the fumes of his alcoholic breath mingled with the stale odor of cigars smote upon her refined nostrils, so that she turned quite sick and faint. During those moments of heart-sickening agony through which Edna was passing, Eugene sat or rather half-sprawled upon the hall seat where the cabman had left him. His legs were spread out in front of him ; his arms hung limp by his side, his chin on his breast and his head leaning against the high carved back of the seat, his hat lying on the floor and his whole attitude betokening a perfectly helpless mental and physical condition that would have discouraged the heart of even a more experienced wife than Edna Vernon. This, then, was what she had waited up and suffered such agonies for through all those long weary hours ! Oh ! it was too cruel—too heartless !

Eugene moved and would have fallen off the seat had she not sprung forward and prevented him by keeping her hand upon his shoulder. Her first impulse was to call one of the servants to help her, but she shrank from the humiliation of their seeing him in such a condition. Then she decided to make an effort herself to get him upstairs to bed. So, suppressing the feeling of repulsion she experienced when she went near him close enough to catch the foul odor of his breath, heavy with the fumes of spirits, she put her arm around his shoulders and said :

“Come, Eugene, let me help you to get upstairs. It is very late, I mean nearly morning, and you cannot stay down here for the maids to see you. Come, you must go to bed,” she urged.

But he only grunted and did not attempt to stir.

"Eugene," she insisted, giving his shoulder a shake as she spoke, "you must come upstairs. Listen to me (as he shook off her hand impatiently, saying "Let me alone") I want you to try and get up to bed before it is light. I'll help you. Come!"

Once more she put her arm around him and tried to raise him to his feet. This roused him sufficiently to say thickly :

"What'sh the mattersh (hic). I saysh, Nell, why the devil can't you leavsh me alone?"

Edna's hand dropped from his shoulder as if he had shot her, and she staggered back against the wall, white and trembling, her eyes staring blankly at the face of her husband, who had sunk again into a dull lethargy. A torrent of thoughts surged through the poor girl's now distracted brain, and for a time she could neither move or speak. She was tempted to go upstairs and leave him to himself. Then her better nature coupled with her pride that would not allow him to remain there as a spectacle to the servants in the morning, prevailed. So with a supreme effort she made another attempt :

"Eugene, wake up ! Look, it is Edna, it is wifie," as he again pushed her away. "See, you are down in the hall and it is nearly four o'clock and will soon be dawn. Come, you must get up to bed. Look, I am here in my wrapper and slippers only, and it is cold ; do come with me ! You are not fit to be left here. Eugene, come !" she pleaded, ready to break down again.

"Yesh, yesh : alrightsh !" This time he opened his bleared eyes and looked at her stupidly, then seemed to recognise her, for he made an effort to pull himself together, and with the aid of her arm sprawled to to his feet and staggered across the hall, only to prop himself up against the wall on the other side, and in his impetuous unsteady lurch he almost knocked his delicate wife down, but she clutched at the hall table and saved herself a heavy fall. A great sob that was partly despair and partly self-pity, rose in

her throat, but with a brave effort she choked it back, remembering heroically that this was no time for weeping or self-indulgence of her own woes. So once more taking him by the arm with one hand, she clutched the banisters with the other, and gradually piloted him up the stairs. He lunged so heavily backwards and forwards that at times she was crushed against the railing, and it was all she could do to save herself and indeed them both from falling backwards. They do say Providence takes special care of little children and drunken men, and certainly Edna Vernon was but as a child in an experience such as this, and as for the drunken man—well, the pity of it was that her husband was in that condition just then.

Poor Edna never quite knew how she managed to steer her helpless husband up those stairs that night; it was ever like a dreadful nightmare to her, though probably had she known as much then as she learned later she would not have wasted so much time and energy, for it is noticeable that men in such a state as he was seem better able to take care of themselves than women give them credit for. But Edna was so inexperienced and so very distressed over this her first terrible trouble, that she feared if she left him for a moment he might die, or something dreadful might happen to him, so she stuck bravely to her self-imposed task with a fidelity and tenacity worthy of a better cause. At last they reached their room and she got him on the bed, where he lay inert and helpless and fully dressed.

The strain and unusual exertion had quite exhausted poor Edna. She sat down to rest in the chair where she had wept so long and bitterly a while ago. Now her bosom heaved and her heart thumped painfully till she thought she should have fainted, so ill did she feel. Rising, she went to the carafe and drank off a glass of cold water, which refreshed her. Then binding up her flowing hair, she turned once more to complete her task to try and get Eugene to bed. This for a time seemed perfectly hopeless,

for he only answered in a maudlin way, and when she bent over him to try and coax him to do as she wished, he would pull her towards him in a rough drunken caress, saying thickly :

“ Kish me, pretty one. Giv’sh a kish, sweetheartsh ! ”

But his wife shrank away from him in disgust and stood by the bedside looking down at the figure as it lay there like a log, with a strange feeling tugging at her heartstrings, a feeling that had never been there before ; and her hands clenched and unclenched as the force of her emotions swelled in her bosom and swayed her frail form. Oh, oh ! was it possible she might ever come to hate him ?

At this moment Eugene became very sick. Then all the womanly nature rose to the surface and sympathy triumphed over disgust. She forgot everything but his need for assistance, and rushed to his side and held his throbbing temples. Then she gently washed his hot flushed face, now almost purple from the strain of retching. With hasty deft fingers she quickly unloosened the shirt collar to give him relief, and his head fell back on the pillow helpless, and before she was aware of it he was in a deep sleep—an alcoholic stupor—and breathing heavily. With all her awakened pity for a man in a state of helplessness, even though the cause were reprehensible, Edna busied herself to make him comfortable, unbuttoned his boots and removed them, not even shrinking from the menial task which her hands had never done before, for all her womanly qualities were uppermost now, and self, with its likes and dislikes, she had put into the background completely.

Little by little she managed to disentangle him from his clothes, for he was helpless and could lend her no assistance, and she had to move him bit by bit till each article of clothing was removed. Several times she had to rest ; many times she almost gave up in despair, and thought that all her labor would be in vain if Milly came in with the

tea in the morning and found the master in this state; all the others would then soon know the truth. No! she would persevere. At last she got him comfortably settled to her satisfaction. Then she took a cambric handkerchief and dipped it in cold water, and, sprinkling some Eau-de-Cologne on it, laid it on his heated brow, brushing the heavy lock of curling dark hair off his forehead with clinging, tender touch.

No, she was not angry with him now—only sorry, very sorry for them both. He was only as a little child to her, he lay so still and passive, and when she had covered him up carefully she stood looking down upon his dark handsome face with a wistful yearning look in her lovely eyes. His right hand, on the little finger of which he wore a handsome diamond ring—her wedding gift to him—lay on the outside of the coverlid; it was such a well-shaped hand, with long taper fingers and filbert nails, beautifully trimmed and polished. As she glanced at it she remembered how often it had caressed her and how tender it could be. This brought the tears again to her eyes, and they began to roll slowly down her pale cheeks; then she reached out her arm and gently stroked with the tips of her fingers the hand where it lay so inert, while she murmured brokenly:

“Oh! Eugene, Eugene, my husband! If you only knew how dearly I love you, you could not inflict such pain upon me. It will break my heart—I cannot bear it, Eugene, Eugene!”

The last words were uttered passionately with a smothered sob, and then she stooped over the sleeping man and, with a full bursting heart, that contained only pity, love and forgiveness for him, kissed his cheek, leaving two big tear drops there, which partly roused the sleeper; but he only muttered something unintelligible, and, turning over with a half-grunt was soon once more wrapped in a heavy slumber.

Turning sadly away, Edna drew the curtains quietly, and put out the gas, for morning had dawned, and with slow, weary steps passed into her dressing

room, where she threw herself upon the big lounge and, drawing a rug over her, lay for some time thinking and suffering, oh, so keenly! But even suffering has a limit, and at last, worn out with weeping, sleep overpowered her senses and for a time Edna forgot her sorrows.

CHAPTER IV.

A MORAL DEATH-BLOW.

How often does it happen that the morning of life to many a young wife opens bright and fair? There is not a cloud in the sky. High noon comes and all is well; then a small cloud, no bigger than a man's hand, appears on the horizon and gradually increases till it attains such vast proportions that it blots out the light of the sun, which rose so gloriously upon them that fair morning. The glory of their short day has departed and a heavy gloom broods over the scene, while the atmosphere is thick and stifling. Then we ask is there no relief from this oppression, nothing that will remove the heavy load from the aching heart or bring peace to the troubled mind? But alas! the burden is a heavy one to bear when it is laid upon our shoulders by the hand of one whom we have loved best. Yet we must be brave and strong, true above all things to ourselves; we must not falter because another has failed. It is then our need for patience is the greater, and even if physically the weaker we should be morally the stronger.

No act, be it ever so terrible on the part of a husband, can justify a wife in retaliating by doing wrong herself. Rather must she rise to a greater degree of goodness and purity, a larger charity, else what hope is there of saving our men, our husbands, sons or brothers? When their women fail them it is as though the very angels fell, since what other angels do they know or love but those of their own hearths and homes? It behoves us as women to stand firm in the time of storm, and face the attack of the enemy

of trial and tribulation with a calm earnest demeanour, fully determined that, never mind what others may do, we at least shall prove true to our high calling as mothers, wives, daughters and sisters.

When we are able to adopt this attitude towards the ills of our lives, then it is the dark cloud of sorrow will gradually gather up its sable skirts and silently steal away, revealing to our weary eyes the silver lining that was always behind its dark pall, although to our tear-dimmed vision it was not discernible. Then we discover our sun of happiness has not yet set, though its light is not so glaring nor its beams so strong, but is soft and mellowed, enveloping us with a peaceful calm that is soothing and restful after the storm. With a sweet serenity we watch the evening shadows steal across our sky and the roseate hues of sunset coloring all the west; and without any useless regrets we remember the brilliancy of the morning, and the storm that o'ershadowed the glory of noonday, conscious that the test and struggle it brought in its train has but revealed our hidden strength—latent powers of endurance which nothing but the storm would have unfolded to our soul's spiritual eyes—the sunshine would but have dazzled us with its glare. Then we realize that Love is an everlasting worker of miracles, and the woman who nobly and faithfully does her duty at all costs finds her rich reward within the heaven of her own soul's consciousness—the reward of achievement. She finds that when all appeared hopelessly lost, and the mists of doubt and the fogs of dark despair enveloped the struggling soul, it has all the while been tenderly guarded and watched over by Love—Infinite Love—and that Love is the Soul's Divine Saviour, the perpetual wonder of the world.

Edna Vernon was now in the midst of the deep storm-clouds which had suddenly darkened her life's sky at noonday. A heavy pall had settled over heart and mind, and everything seemed dark. After the memorable experience of that night of suffering and heart-agony there was a season of repentance; fresh

promises of amendment, and assurances that there would be no recurrence of the same condition again on Eugene's part. This was accepted by Edna in good faith, but in less than a fortnight the same thing happened again. Then as he had once allowed her to see his lapses he appeared to have little compunction about the matter, and evidently made no effort to pull himself together. He just drifted back into the old mode of living in which he indulged to the full in his bachelor days, and had really only abandoned temporarily while the glamor of a new sensation, such as was the advent of his beautiful young wife, held sway over him. So Edna had occasion to become quite familiar with such scenes, and under such conditions—sometimes better, oftentimes worse—she endured another four months of heart-breaking, heart-aching existence, for it could not well be termed living.

One night Eugene came home worse than usual and Edna in disgust refused to share their room and repaired to a spare apartment, there to spend the night in tears, for lately sleep had forsaken her overstrung nerves. She had not long retired when she heard the door-handle turn and Eugene stood by her bedside, and in thick insolent tones commanded her to come back to her own room.

"I cannot sleep with you; it makes me ill to be near you when you are as you are to-night," she replied quietly. She had now got past quarrelling with him and seldom let him see her weeping.

"You are mighty dainty, madam. I tell you I want you to come with me. I'm your husband and I'll see I get a husband's privileges."

"I cannot come to-night."

"You mean you won't," he retorted.

No answer came from the woman on the bed. The light was turned low and the room was in partial gloom. Then suddenly she was seized by the shoulder and forcibly dragged out of the bed and across the room in the direction of the door. She struggled with her half-drunken husband and managed to break loose

from his cruel grip. Then finding she refused to be forced, he turned upon her and lifting his fist struck her on the shoulder and felled her at his feet, saying thickly in angry tones :

"Then stay where you are, d——n you. I don't want an unwilling woman." and, turning, he left her where she lay.

Edna fainted and as the servants' quarters were at the back of the house and the hour was late the fall was not heard. She did not know how long she lay there, but was next conscious of opening her eyes on the bed and seeing her husband's face bending over her, trying to force some spirits between her lips. Then he kissed her madly, passionately, calling her his darling, his pet, and every endearing term that had once been familiar to her ears in the days when she thought love never could be cruel. Now his words fell on ears that heard only—the sore heart in her aching breast could not respond. Pleadings for forgiveness and contrition followed and, white and silent, Edna lay listening as one who had lost all power to feel or respond.

"Edna, wifie, say you forgive me ;" pleaded Eugene.

As she did not answer he put his hands under her and tried to enfold her in his arms, but the pain of the bruised and blackened shoulder made her cry out and beg to be left alone.

"I couldn't have hurt you so much as that, surely ?" he said, protestingly. "Let me see it, and I'll kiss the spot." Then in spite of her protestations he insisted upon examining the spot on her white shoulder where his cruel fist had left its mark.

"Wifie, I'm sorry. Do say you forgive me ? I must have been drunk or mad," urged Eugene, now thoroughly sobered and most penitent. "Put your arms round my neck and say you forgive."

"Yes, I forgive you," said Edna in a lifeless tone, but a feeling of deadness crept over her entire being, and she only had one wish and that was that she might die.

This was only one of many such scenes through which this woman had to pass during that time of testing. But oh, the agony of heart and mind which she endured! She did not think she had such a capacity for suffering. It seemed at times as though she were bearing the heaped up sorrows and sufferings of all her sex; as though she must feel the heart-ache of every wife who had ever known a grief or endured the pangs of a broken heart. Oh! those long nights of torture and the utter loneliness of it all, for there was not one soul to whom she could go to pour out her heart's burden of woe; not one from whom she could ask help to bear what only she herself must endure; no one to sympathise with her or give her one kind pitying word. She was too proud to tell her troubles to strangers, and would never let her mother know what she was passing through. She clung desperately to one ray of hope, one tiny ray, which she thought might change all her darkness into light and bring her erring husband back to her side in love and sympathy. It was the prospect she cherished in the advent of her baby. He could not be cruel then! No! When baby came into the home all would be well again; his heart would turn to them both and all would be peace and love. He was worried just now because the share market was all wrong and he had been losing so much money. Yes, she must excuse him for drinking and being so bad tempered; she would forgive him and be patient and loving and he would soon be his old self again—the Eugene she had married—her ideal man! So argued Edna, and in this manner she deluded herself that all was peace, peace, when deep in her heart there was a strong conviction that there was no peace and never would be again for her.

The next trouble which came upon her was when financial disaster overtook Eugene Vernon. The shares in one of the big mines on the Boulder Block had risen to fabulous prices and he had bought heavily under "cover," holding large parcels in the belief that they would rise still higher, but, owing to a report

sent in by an expert who had been appointed by the London board of directors to sample the mine, being unfavorable, and recommending the closing down of the property for six months' development, the shares fell from so many pounds to the same value in shillings. This meant ruin to many, and to Eugene Vernon in particular. He could not retrieve his losses on other scrip, as the share market was "all to pieces," to use mining parlance, and owing to the "slump" his clients were pressing for payment; while to borrow money to retrieve his losses was out of the question. Edna wrote and told her father of the disaster which had overtaken her husband, and Mr. Esbourne promptly sent Eugene a cheque for £4,000 to help tide him over; but though Edna did not know it, this sum was but as a drop in the ocean to Eugene's debts, for he had been spending much more lavishly than his wife was aware of and had long been in difficulties, though he had been able to keep afloat.

The end of this was that their beautiful home at Claremont was sold up and Edna had to remove to a smaller house in town, situated on Adelaide Terrace, East Perth—quite a different class of residence from that they had been accustomed to. This, however, she did not mind, since she was nearer her friends, and she comforted herself with the thought that now she was so close to the clubs and the city, Eugene would not not have the same excuse for remaining out so late. In both these ideas she was doomed to be disillusioned. Like many others, Edna soon discovered that reverses of fortune thin the ranks of one's friends, and also that when a husband wants an excuse for remaining out at night he will readily find one.

Edna was as much if not more alone than ever. Eugene had the ever-ready plea that he must watch the share market hourly, and to keep his finger on its pulse, so to speak, must be where men most do congregate and discuss these matters, and naturally that was not at home with his delicate ailing wife in a house where only one servant was now kept and no

company of the class he loved was available. Many a night he never came home at all and when he put in an appearance the next morning for clean linen he looked so dissipated and "seedy" that Edna could not but wonder where and how he had spent the night.

One morning early in September, when Eugene had again failed to come home, the post brought a letter to Edna addressed in a strange hand and evidently written by an uneducated person. It asked her to come at once to an address given and she would hear something concerning her husband that would be best for her to know. The letter ended with a postscript urging her to come as soon as possible, and was signed "A Friend."

An anonymous letter! With a feeling of disgust Edna cast it from her and determined to ignore it. Such epistles in her opinion were beneath contempt. She would wait till Eugene came home and show it to him and then burn it. Thinking thus, she occupied herself with her morning duties and waited. But the morning hours wore on and still Eugene did not come. She began to get anxious. Then she suddenly thought, perhaps he was ill. Perhaps he had got into some trouble—had been too impulsive as was his wont when drunk or angry, and had struck someone and been hurt in the unseemly encounter. This was not an unusual occurrence with him—the word and then the blow. She knew him now so well. Yes, she would go to him and learn what was the matter, what was detaining him; but she would call at the office first.

Picking up the letter and touching it with a feeling of repulsion, she noted the address and entered it on her tablets, then folded the rather soiled looking note and placed it in another envelope and took it with her. On her way she called at her husband's office in St. George's Terrace, but learned that he had not been in since the previous afternoon. Without further comment or inquiry from the clerk, Edna set forth to find the address given her in the letter. She had no idea where to look for the street, except that

it was in a place called Leederville, and as there were no trams in those days she had to take an antiquated omnibus and ask the driver to put her down at the road she mentioned.

Arriving at length at a rather desolate looking suburb with a few houses scattered here and there on bare looking blocks of ground—they could not be called gardens, for there was little if any sign of vegetation anywhere, being principally sand hummocks with a few stunted trees at intervals—Edna sought the house. No number had been given, but it was apparently known by the name, "Glen Villa," which after a great deal of walking and making inquiries she eventually found. It was a double-fronted cottage with a verandah and two bow windows, with cane blinds hung in front to break the glare of the sun. On passing up the path from the wooden gate and on to the verandah she saw a child's swing suspended from the rafter of the verandah roof, and in it sat a little fellow of about four years of age, with rosy face, laughing dark eyes and curly hair, who shouted "Hullo!" as she appeared.

The front door stood open and Edna knocked gently on the wooden panel, when a young woman emerged from a side door in the passage carrying a baby in her arms, which appeared to be but a few months old. She was dressed in a rather soiled-looking tea-gown that had once been handsome, but now showed signs of wear. Her mass of black hair was loosely coiled in a knot at the back of her head, while there was an air of untidiness about her whole person, a vulgarity that was to Edna's refined nature most repulsive. Short and thick-set of figure, with full bust and white soft bosom and throat which the open-necked tea-gown fully exposed, she stood before Edna and gazed at her blankly with bold black eyes, waiting till her visitor should speak.

The child in the swing had by this time wriggled out and stood by the woman's side, holding on to her gown and looking at Edna as she said rather diffidently,

fearing she had made a mistake, or been misled by the letter, which she now held in her hand :

" I beg your pardon, but can you tell me if it was anyone here who wrote to me ? I am Mrs. Reginald Vernon."

" No, there was no one here to write to any person of that name," replied the woman, with a toss of her head.

" Are you sure ? " questioned Edna, nervously. " Is Mr. Vernon not here ? I was under the impression he might be ill and this letter said I would find him here ? "

" No, I know nothing about him nor the letter ; there must be some mistake. I ——."

At that moment a voice from within called " Nell, Nell ! " loudly and impatiently. The child at her feet said in his little shrill voice, " Daddy's callin' Mummy ! " But it did not need anything more than the repetition of that name, " Nell," to convince Edna that Eugene's was the voice that was calling the woman who stood before her now trying to close the door. But Edna was too quick and before she was fully aware what she was about to do, or that she was taking an unparalleled liberty, she had stepped across the threshold into the passage, and had entered the door which stood open on the left of her, from which the woman had emerged when Edna knocked. Immediately she found herself inside the room she stopped as if shot and stood as though turned to stone.

" My God, Edna ! What brought *you* here ? " Then the next moment the man had drawn the counterpane over his face and lay like a guilty criminal, not daring to look into the face of his wife.

It was a bedroom and from all appearances Eugene Vernon was perfectly at home there. His attire lay about the room mixed up with the garments of the mother and children. All was disorder.

It seemed an eternity, if suffering recorded time to Edna Vernon, though in reality it was but a few

seconds that she stood there as one rooted to the spot. The little laddie's voice first aroused her numbed senses, saying as he tried to pull the covering from his father's face

"Look, Daddy! Look at pretty lady!" But the next moment the mother, who had followed Edna into the room, caught him roughly by the arm and dragged him away. Then Edna found her voice and stepping to the side of the disordered bed she tried to draw the quilt from her husband's face, saying in a toneless voice :

"I sought my husband and this is how I find him. Let me look once more on the face of the man who has broken my heart and wrecked my life. Eugene Vernon, let me see your face!"

But the man held tightly to the cover and she could not remove it, nor would he either move or speak. His demeanour in this moment of exposure was that of a coward.

Then Edna turned from the bed and was about to leave the room, when she encountered the woman standing behind the door with her face buried in her baby's neck, while the little fellow clung to her gown with frightened staring eyes, not understanding what was the matter. As Edna beheld them thus a great wave of pity flooded her being and the mother heart in her ached for this woman's shame and sorrow. All the woman in Edna rose to the surface. Pausing, she placed her hand upon the shoulder of the woman, and said gently, almost tenderly :

"Little sister, when he treats you as he has treated me, then may God pity you!"

There was no answer except a smothered sob, and Edna turned once more to the shrouded form of her husband huddled on the bed, and addressing it in harsher tones, said :

"Eugene Vernon, may God deal with you as you have dealt with me!"

Without another word or backward glance Edna Vernon turned and left the room and house. At the

gate she heard a voice she knew only too well calling, "Edna! Edna!" she never heeded it nor paused, but walked away, away, like one in a dream, not knowing nor caring whither her footsteps were bent.

The quiet dignity with which his wife acted in that awful hour appealed to Eugene Vernon more than any tears or reproaches or bitter accusations. The moment she was gone he sprang to his feet, calling her name wildly and bidding the woman whom he addressed as "Nell" go and call her back. But she did not obey—only stood as one petrified, till, seeing her inactivity and indifference, he became enraged and turned upon her, exclaiming:

"You she-devil, I believe your cursed jealousy has been at the bottom of this trouble. Well, by G—— I'll make you suffer for it if it has."

Then followed a scene too painful to record and which was only one of many to which Nell Allen had become accustomed since her connection with Reg. Vernon five years before that fatal day when Edna discovered his infidelity.

Edna wandered aimlessly on through what seemed to her interminable miles of sandy roads, feeling that she must get away somewhere alone with her sorrow. Somewhere that she could hide herself and give way to this awful passion of tears that welled up in her bosom. She would not take the 'bus again, but kept walking on, on, till at last she came to the gates of a cemetery. Here she turned in gratefully, feeling that at least she would be alone, alone with the silent sleepers whose sorrows and heart pangs were over, and who, after life's fitful fever, slept well. Threading her way between the graves, she sought a quiet spot in a remote and neglected corner, and there upon a flat stone, which almost mechanically she observed was "Sacred to the Memory" of someone's "mother," Edna cast herself down prone and lay for some time sobbing bitterly. Only God in His infinite mercy and love could comfort that bruised spirit and broken heart. Only He knew the depth of the agony she was

enduring. When the soul is passing through deep waters such as were those in which Edna Vernon was now engulfed, no words can describe the poignancy of the pains it writhes under, nor the pangs that rend its very life-cords asunder. At a time like this its travail is sacred to the eye of its Creator, and He also is its Deliverer.

Hours passed and still Edna lay prostrate under this load of grief. Till the sun had set and the evening shadows were closing in she forgot everything, and only lay moaning and crying brokenly, "Oh! God, help me! Pity me and take me to Thyself! I cannot bear it! I cannot, I *cannot*!"

At times she would stir and lifting her white face to the now star-spangled sky would moan bitterly, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? O! if someone would only help me to bear this awful pain! Mother! mother! If you only knew how your Edna is suffering you would come to me, my mother!"

Silence. All round that quiet churchyard reigned a silence that could be felt. Feeling the awe of the place steal into her soul, Edna raised herself upon her elbow and looked around her wildly, fearfully. Where was she? How long had she been there? It seemed an age since she had left her home that day.

Then in the twilight she saw the gleam of the river not far away, and her mind leaped from one thought to another. Yes, there was help out of her trouble; there at least was peace for her and rest for her aching heart. She could drown herself, she would take baby with her thus, and he should never have it to call by his name. It would be hers, only hers, and together they would lie here with those silent sleepers in this quiet churchyard. With stiff and weary limbs she dragged herself from her prostrate position on the tomb and stood upright. Then she recognised the spot: she was in the East Perth cemetery, and there was the river not far from the fence. She would find her way down to it and — and —! Just then

the awfulness of her resolve dawned upon her and she turned her eyes from its fascinating gleam and, burying her face in her hands, prayed that she might be forgiven. With weary steps she moved among the graves, all looking so white and shadowy in the starlight. Presently she came upon the little chapel that stood in the centre, and quickening her footsteps she decided to go in there and pray to be forgiven for what she was about to do. Pushing the door, she found it was unlocked, and with timid halting steps Edna entered the gloomy precincts of the sacred edifice. Only a faint ray of light came in through a western window and fell upon the altar; all the rest of the place was in darkness. Feeling her way by the backs of the seats, she sat down on the first she came to and bowed her head on the book-board. A feeling of deep awe almost amounting to terror took possession of her, and for a time she could not even pray or think—only feel with every nerve in her being, till she ached from head to foot.

Oh! how weary she was, how tired of everything, how ill she felt! Yes, she thought she must be going to die—die and never see her baby's face, never look upon the face of Eugene Vernon in life again. Well, if that was so, she was glad; she never wished to. She knew she would never see him but as her mind pictured him that afternoon, and to think of it was torture to her soul. Then it occurred to her that if she was going to die she would like to die at the altar steps; so rising, she groped her way up the aisle till she came to the reading desk. Just here she tripped over a hassock and, stooping, drew it along till she felt the first step leading to the altar, and kneeling there she prayed as she had never prayed since she was a child, about fourteen years of age, when early religious fervor had taken possession of her impressionable heart. She poured out her very soul in supplication till tears rolled down her cheeks like rivers of waters, purifying her soul to its centre. Then a feeling of utter collapse came over her and she sank in a heap at the altar railings and slid down till

she lay with her head on the hassock and there a wondrous peace stole over her entire being, a hush fell upon her heart and mind, like that which came upon Galilee's turbid waters when the Voice of Love commanded, "Peace! Be still!"

It was rosy dawn when Edna woke or recovered consciousness from that long torpor into which she had sunken at the steps of the altar. Rousing herself, she looked around and for the first few moments could not realize where she was. Perhaps she was dead and this was the place where her body was lying awaiting burial, for she recognised that she was in a church. Then suddenly the agony of the previous night flashed upon her and, remembering all, she inwardly shuddered, and rose to her feet. Then in gratitude to God for having saved her from the sin of taking her own life, Edna knelt once more in prayer before the altar, where she had unconsciously spent the night, and humbly prayed for forgiveness. She asked for help and guidance to face what she would have to bear that just newly born day, whose first faint light was now beaming through the stained glass of the windows that faced the east, throwing rainbow hues upon the pulpit and the altar, and even dancing upon her hair and face in fitful gleams.

Rising from her knees, Edna left the little chapel, which had been as a city of refuge in time of great distress, and with a deep inexpressible calm in her breast she sought her own home. Arriving there, she learned from the maid that her husband had been home about seven the previous evening and had gone out again, then returned later to ascertain if she was back yet, and learning that she had not been in since morning, had again gone. Ordering a cup of tea to be brought up to her room, Edna went upstairs, and after partaking of the beverage the maid brought her she undressed and lay down, but in less than an hour she was taken seriously ill, and the doctor was sent for. Her husband was telephoned for and messengers sent to bring him to her

bedside, as she was not expected to live ; but Eugene Vernon could not be found in any of his usual haunts. He was lying at " Glen Villa " in a drunken stupor, unconscious of his wife's danger. When he could not find her on the day of the exposure he had promptly soaked himself in whiskey to drown the remorse that seized him. This bout continued for a week and ended in delirium tremens, through which Nell Allen nursed him faithfully and kept him hidden.

A little daughter was born to Edna Vernon in the midst of her greatest trouble. The doctor ordered her removal to a private hospital, where she would receive proper nursing and care. It was here her mother found her on her arrival from the Eastern States lying between life and death ; and the discovery of her daughter's condition was a terrible shock to Mrs. Esbourne, who had had no suspicion that anything was the matter, for Edna had carefully hidden her sorrow and disappointment from them all at home, fearing to cause them pain or distress and knowing that the choice which had brought this trouble upon her was her own.

The frail little life of the babe blossomed only for a few days and then passed out, and the young mother's only yearning was that she might go with her child. But although she hovered between life and death for many weary weeks, she was saved for better things. During her hours of delirium, when the fever was at its height, she went through those harrowing scenes which were imprinted indelibly upon her heart and mind. Thus her mother and the nurses learned what she had suffered and what was the true cause of her severe illness, and Eugene Vernon's absence from his wife's side at such a crisis confirmed their worst suspicions.

By careful nursing and her mother's devoted love and care, Edna at last gradually rallied, and slowly came back as it were from the very brink of the grave. But she was as the very ghost of her old self. All her lovely black hair had been shorn

off close to her head during the worst stage of her illness, which quite altered her appearance, and the oval face was now long, thin and white. It was but the bruised and broken remnants of a life that seemed left to her now ; all the glory of her beauteous maidenhood and budding womanhood had departed and she lay a shattered wreck, a broken lily with its proud and queenly head laid low in the dust of humiliation and woe. Ah ! yes, it was indeed a scene of desolation which the flood-waters of grief had left behind them, and because the vision had once been so lovely the contrast was more marked, the ravages more terrible.

Edna never consciously mentioned Eugene Vernon's name and they did not speak it in her hearing. She seemed as though she had died to love, had become frozen as it were to any feeling, and was more like a beautiful marble statue where once she had been a living, passionate highly-strung woman. But even this regrettable result to her had its compensations in the end, and the experience gained through suffering lasted her for the remainder of her earth-life. Her purification was complete and out of it was born a sublime compassion—a compassion that covered all woman-kind—and was the one touch of tenderness wanted at this particular stage of her development to complete the grand character of the woman. God's hand was that of the Master Sculptor which held the chisel that shaped it ; and the man Eugene Vernon was the tool with which the work was done. When the modelling was completed, the tool was discarded and the Spirit of Love did the polishing, till the angel stood forth, where the imperfect yet beautiful woman had but before been visible.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREAT REVELATION.

"There are persons so near the doorway of knowledge, that life itself prepares them for it, and no individual hand has to invoke the guardian of the entrance. These must naturally be keen and powerful organizations, capable of the most vivid pleasure; then pain comes and fills its great duty. The most intense forms of suffering fall on such a nature, till at last it rouses from its stupor of consciousness and by the force of its intense vitality steps over the threshold into a place of Peace. Then the vibration of life loses its power of tyranny. The sensitive nature must suffer still, but the soul has freed itself and stands aloof, guiding the life towards its greatness."

—"LIGHT ON THE PATH."

Six months later Edna was back at "Cumbooquepa" Homestead: she went back to take her place there once again as Miss Esbourne. Her indignant father obtained a divorce for her as soon as the necessary preliminaries could be arranged, and as Eugene Vernon did not attempt to defend the case, it was quickly disposed of and she obtained her *decree nisi* with only a month to wait till it should be made absolute. Edna took no active interest in the matter, only passively submitted to anything her parents and advisers thought best. Her attitude towards life was that of one who considered she had drained life's cup of Joy and Sorrow to the lees.

The bitter and terrible experiences through which Edna Vernon had passed would never be forgotten by her even though they were buried in the past when she relinquished the name she had borne for scarcely three short years. Years, nevertheless, that would be indelibly imprinted upon the tablets of her memory. The influence which the man had left upon her young life would not be easily eradicated, especially in a nature like hers, so intensely earnest and deeply impassionate. But the queenly Edna was a changed girl. She had suddenly altered in appearance and manner into mature womanhood. Her hair, had begun to grow again, but as the fresh growth appeared it was silvery white, and her head was covered with

soft short curls like the newly fallen snow flakes. The contrast with her youthful and still beautiful face was remarkable. The countenance retained its sweetness and fair womanly charm, though the ordeal she had passed through had left traces of its chastening hand under the dark expressive eyes. There was a softer and more tender light in their depths, and a gentler more compassionate smile upon the once brilliant red lips ; and although the queenly head still retained its imperious poise, it was more with the consciousness of an inner victory over self and a newly revealed power—the power to endure, to suffer and be strong—than any personal pride of face or form.

The chief change lay in her general demeanour towards life. She who had been the very life and soul of the household in the old days had grown strangely silent and grave for her years ; almost taciturn with strangers, and even among her own circle of friends she would never speak of those days of storm and stress in the West : they were a sealed book to her, and all in the home respected her feelings too much ever to revert to the subject in any way. Nor was the name of Eugene Vernon ever mentioned in that household. He had apparently passed out of their lives as suddenly as he had appeared ; but he had brought about the process that, though severe, had yielded the pure gold from the woman's character. His was the hand that brought her to this place of sacrifice, and though it seemed cruel and unnecessary to her at the time, still not one pang could have been spared, not one hour of torture been shortened by even a moment ; all had to be full and complete till the last ordeal, when the ashes of humiliation were heaped upon her bowed head and broken spirit. Then the old Edna died—died in the hour when she realized that Eugene Vernon was faithless. Her idol was shattered and Edna was buried in the ruins ; and up till this hour the woman who roamed listlessly through the scenes of her childhood was but the ghost of her old self.

The real Edna—the spiritual woman, “Màya”—had not yet risen from the grave.

Alas! how true it is that a man may sow his wild oats alone, yet he seldom has the privilege, or even the power, to reap them in like manner. Others must be made to suffer, to bear the shame and burden of his sins, others who, though innocent are yet made the scapegoats and are driven into the wilderness for the transgressions of the many.

In her early girlhood Edna had believed in the existence of a personal God, in the most orthodox fashion; that is, she went to church, was regular at her prayers, and felt that the care of her soul was in the hands of the clergyman who visited them at regular intervals. The rest was a matter which she did not greatly trouble herself about, that could all be arranged when she grew old, or was likely to die. However, when her first trouble fell upon her, and through the tragic death of poor Sidney Mostyn, she was brought so near the dark valley of the Shadows, she began to think it necessary to understand more about her soul. Then for a time she studied the Bible and read Thomas à Kempis, morning and evening, and tried to follow out the teachings he laid down for the Christian. This was very consoling while she was too weak and stricken to think very much on any subject, but when she got stronger and was able to be about once more much of her old verve returned to her, and she felt as if the humility which her beloved Thomas a’Kempis inspired her with was too crippling for her stronger nature. She yearned for strengthening spiritual food, but before she could find what she craved for, the second blow came, and she was stricken down like a reed before the wind, and at the mercy of the storm without a haven of refuge.

Then it was that she began to doubt if there were a just and good God, and to wonder in whom she had been believing. If the God whom she had been praying to could be as good and loving as her own

father even, she felt confident he would never have afflicted her thus. She knew that her parent would have borne every pang himself that she might be spared, yet here was a God, a most good, mighty and supreme Being, who was supposed to pity his children as a Father, and now she thought He had not more pity for her bruised and broken heart than a mortal. The tortured soul of the girl cried aloud under her great load of grief, and in her agony of mind absolutely refused to call upon Him whom she considered had turned a deaf ear to her plaint in deepest sorrow.

She looked everywhere, and sought high and low for comfort, but found none; since her mind was unwilling to accept and believe that which she could not understand. She could not reconcile her idea of God as she once accepted Him—the Good Loving Father as taught by theology—could not believe in Him as such, after what she had suffered from His hands, and without any just cause so far as she could see. The injustice of the treatment was what stung her so keenly; it was the one bitter drop in all her draught of woe. Poor Edna! she was like a ship at sea which had lost her rudder and was at the mercy of the waves of affliction and the winds of doubt. Once she could believe implicitly in the existence of a Supreme Being who sat up aloft and ordered all things well for His creatures here below, but now she had lost that implicit faith, and so far there was nothing to take its place. She could not return to her old belief, and there was not sufficient consolation in anything else to support her on her dark and lonely journey to some as yet unseen goal.

Her parents sought to help her by telling her that all was well and God knew best, but she did not see why He should know what was best for her and not explain why it was by Him considered so. She was surely entitled to know. She was endowed with strong reasoning powers, and with the desire to understand those things which she attempted to investigate. Why then was she to believe blindly, and not dare to

ask a question regarding her own life's plan? The clergyman tried to instil her with some of her old belief, but she felt that his consolations were but words, mere words, and had no life in them; in fact she even doubted if he believed what he said himself. So that all the ministrations they offered the stricken, hungry, and desolate soul of the girl were of no avail to heal her and give her the true comfort she craved. Oh! how she yearned for Peace. For many months she sought it and found it not, till one night—one memorable night—it flowed into her empty and barren soul like a healing flood. Then she who had sat in darkness saw a great and glorious Light.

Edna had been reading a great deal during her time of doubt and trial, and among her numerous favorites she had found most consolation and help from the writings of Emerson and Ruskin; while the philosophy of Kant and Plato was studied with an earnestness that set her thinking for herself. The idea of the "Over-Soul" as Emerson termed that which she knew as God, was one that gripped her strongly and appealed to her mind, while the thoughts which she found among some of Robert Browning's poems also coincided with what she had blindly been trying to reason out for herself during all those long months of mental and spiritual battle.

These writers prepared the way for another less abstruse, and of whom she had never previously heard till someone placed a copy in her hands, saying "that as she was a great reader perhaps she would understand the author's arguments."

The book was entitled "Your Forces and How to Use Them," by Prentice Mulford, and contained a number of essays on the very subjects which were agitating Edna's mind at the time.

When she began to read, she found there expressed the very ideas regarding God which had so long been surging through her mind, and the first word that

met her eager eyes was "God," and ran as follows:—
"GOD.

"A supreme Power and Wisdom governs the Universe. The Supreme mind is measureless and pervades endless space. The Supreme Wisdom, Power and Intelligence is in every thing that exists, from the atom to the planet. The Supreme Power and Wisdom is more than *in* everything. The Supreme mind *is* everything. The Supreme mind is every atom of the mountain, the sea, the tree, the bird, the animal, the man, the woman. The Supreme Wisdom cannot be understood by man nor by beings superior to man. But man will gladly receive the Supreme thought and wisdom, and let it work for happiness through him caring not to fathom its mystery.

"The Supreme Power has us in its charge, as it has the suns and endless systems of worlds in space. As we grow more to recognise this sublime and exhaustless wisdom, we shall learn more and more to demand that wisdom, draw it to ourselves, making it a part of ourselves, and thereby be ever making ourselves newer and newer. This means ever perfecting health, greater and greater power to enjoy all that exists, gradual transition into a higher state of being, and the development of powers we do not now realize as belonging to us.

"We are limited and ever-growing parts and expressions of the Supreme Never-Ending Whole. It is the destiny of all in time to see their relation to the Supreme, and also to see that the straight and narrow path to ever-increasing happiness is a perfect trust and dependence on the Supreme, for the all-round symmetrical wisdom and idea which we individually cannot originate. Let us then daily demand faith, for faith is power to believe and power to see that all things are parts of the Infinite Spirit of God—or Good—that all things have Good—or God—in them, and that all things when recognised by us as parts of God must work for our good."

The book fell from the girl's hands and she sprang

to her feet with a cry of joy. " Yes, I *can* believe that, I *feel* that I am part of a great whole, and that Whole is God or Good ! Not a person, not a magnified Man, but Good, Good ! That which is good in all of us, yes that which was GOOD, very good from the beginning. That is God ; yes, that alone is God ! "

Then stepping out through her room door, into the stillness of the summer night, she crossed the lawn and stood under a spreading plane tree, and there beneath the soft rays of the moon the girl knelt on the green sward and, gazing up into the far-away vault of heaven, cried aloud : " O God, my God ! I have found you at last. I know I have found you now, though I have sought you long and with tears, I shall never lose you again, for now that I have found you with my whole being, my soul is satisfied and I shall learn to know you more and more. Yes, I cannot ever be alone and desolate, for I have found my heaven and know my God. Oh ! how my heart sings for joy, that *this, this* is indeed God. What a glorious God Thou art ! There is no other can compare with Thee. I see Thee everywhere, I love Thee in everything and worship Thee in Nature as well as in my own heart. Let me see Thee daily more and more, for I shall only be satisfied ' when I awake in Thy Likeness.' Oh ! beautiful, grand, and wonderful Creator ! I could cry aloud for joy because I know Thee at last, I see Thee with my own eyes, when I look on Thy works, and I feel Thee here with me to-night as I never felt Thee or anything like Thee before. This is Love. Yes, of course, it is *LOVE* and LOVE is GOD."

For a very long time the young girl with her crown of silvery hair knelt there in the white moonlight, wrapt in the new and wondrous joy that had come upon her thus suddenly, and her face in its worshipful adoration was bathed in a radiance that gave to it the appearance of an angel. This was no slavish worship of an idol, no forced homage to a Kingly Being who sat on a distant throne : it was the deep and true adoration of the Greatest and Grandest

thing ever known—the recognition by the creature of its Creator, and the finding of that Creator in the only Heaven and upon the only throne which he could possibly occupy—in the Heaven of man's own consciousness, and upon the Throne of his own heart. That is where the King of Righteousness is found ; there is the Holy of Holies, the altar where the bread and wine of the spirit is administered to the hungry soul ; there the storm-tossed and weary pilgrim alone finds rest and Peace, perfect peace, that passeth understanding.

Edna Esbourne had found this Peace to-night, and her soul was feasting off the food that was so freely offered her ; so that she was lost to all sense of time, and knew not that she had lingered beneath the night sky in communion with her newly-found Heavenly Father till the first grey streaks of dawn appeared in the east. Then, rousing herself, with a deep sigh of contentment, she retraced her steps to the house. Pausing on the verandah and lifting her eyes to the starry canopy above her, she stretched out her arms, and with an expression of deep soul yearning, cried aloud :

“ Oh ! Thou Great Intelligence, lift my soul into the light of Thy presence, breathe the love of the universe into my heart, give me the power to know Thee, the All-Good, and see Thee, the All-Pure, in all beings. Thus alone can I worship Thee whom my soul has sought so long. The Heart of God beats through me, so that His Love is my love, the Mind of God thinks through me, so that His thoughts are my thoughts, the Life of God pulsates through my veins, so that His glorious Life is my Life ; and His perfect Peace—the peace that is over everything here to-night—yes, that is the Peace that fills me at this moment. Oh ! God, I am glad, glad with a great gladness that I lost you, to find you thus.”

For the next few days Edna was as one who walked in a dream, for she was living in a world of her own, a world that not one of her dear ones could enter,

but she was happy with a great and wondrous happiness that passed even her own understanding. She could not speak of this new Light that had dawned upon her—flashed, we should say—for it was like the Light that flashed across the path of Saul and revealed to him the Christ within himself, in the form of that Jesus whom he was persecuting. Therefore, though her parents and her brothers and sisters saw the change that had come over their beloved Edna, they were quite at a loss to understand the cause of it. Edna had been let into the mysteries of the deep things of God, and she found her lips closed when she attempted to reveal them to others.

Grace was the first to speak of the change, and to ask Edna for the cause of her altered looks and manner. At first she could not answer, till Grace said, gently, taking her elder sister's hand in hers, while her great blue eyes scanned her half-averted face :

" I know what has made the change in you, Edna, darling. It is because your heart is at peace ; you have found God again. Haven't you ? "

" Yes, my pet," cried Edna. " I have. But how did you know ? "

" I dreamt it, Edna dear. I had a beautiful dream about you the other night. I thought I saw you and God alone. You had such a long talk together, and at first you would not believe it was God ; but after a while I saw a transformation on your face. Then, Edna, I knew you believed, and that you would never doubt again. You looked so wonderfully happy. But, Edna, the strangest part of my dream was that when I looked hard at what I knew was God, I saw—what do you think I saw ? "

Edna shook her head, for she could not trust herself to speak.

" Well, dearest, I saw not a MAN, not even an awful or wonderful Being, but, Edna, I just saw YOU, your very SELF, and no one else. Only that it was a lovely, glorified Self, a grander *you* than you have ever been. Yet though it was you, dear, there

were two of you, separate and distinct. *They were two YOU'S in unity.* Edna, don't you think it was a strange dream, and yet a very beautiful one? "

" Yes, my darling, it was very remarkable ; still, when I tell you my own little story it will not seem so wonderful, and you will understand it better, as your dream has made me understand it all for myself." As Edna spoke she bent over the couch of her invalid sister and kissed the sweet face lovingly, tenderly. Then sitting down by her side she related to her the experiences of her soul in its search for its lost God.

Grace listened attentively till Edna concluded, and when silence fell between them she stretched out her arms and drew her elder sister's head down upon her breast and, laying her own cheek against Edna's, said softly :

" Dear, dear Edna, I am so glad. So very, very happy about it. I know how you feel, and I understand what a sweet peace there must be in your heart now. Of course, I do not grasp the full meaning of your grand idea about God, but I feel that it is God whom you have found. I have the same God, only that to me He is more like Jesus Christ, and to Him I have prayed for you for a very long time now. At last He has answered my prayers, and oh ! Edna, I love Him so for it."

" Dear little Gracie, I am pleased indeed that I have been able to strengthen your faith," said Edna, as she lifted herself from her sister's encircling arms. " But Gracie, perhaps you do not know that your dream voiced a great truth, when you said you saw my glorified Self and thought it was God."

" Did I, Edna ? " queried Grace, with wide-open eyes.

" Yes ; because I am beginning to understand that it is our Higher, our Diviner Self that is *God* —God *in US*."

" How could we be God ? " asked Grace.

" Well, each one, every man, must be a god unto himself, and as he manifests this god so is he his own

redeemer and saviour. Though we worship the one God of all the earth, it is not as one personality, but it is the one God in many Personalities. Just the One Great Reality, the One Universal Spirit of Life in all beings. I think this is what Jesus meant when he said: 'Your Father and my Father, your God and my God!'"

"I am afraid the thought is too vast for me to understand it all at once," said Grace, with a puzzled look in her blue eyes.

"Perhaps not, darling, but you will understand soon. I feel it all here"—placing her hand over her heart as she spoke—"but I am only a learner myself as yet. Just try to think that your highest ideal of yourself is God—or Good—and my highest ideal of myself is also God; yet you are not me, nor am I you; but is not the highest conception of Good in each of us the best we know, the all we can conceive of Good, the grandest we can imagine of God? Well, that Good is God! Do you grasp it, Gracie?" asked Edna.

"Yes, yes, Edna, I do!" cried the girl eagerly, while her eyes sparkled with a great light and a far away look came into their clear depths. "Oh! what a beautiful thought it is. Now I understand what those lines mean which were running in my mind yesterday. I could not grasp their meaning, nor do I remember where I learned them: they just came to me like a whisper from somewhere within me. Shall I repeat them to you, Edna?"

"Yes, please do, my pet," assented Edna, at once interested.

"They ran through my mind like this," and Gracie began:

"God and I in space alone,
And nobody else in view;

'But where are the people, Lord,' I said,
'The earth below and the sky o'erhead,
And the dead whom once I knew?'

“ ‘ That was a dream,’ God smiled and said,
‘ A dream that *seemed* to be true.
There were no people living or dead,
There was no earth and no sky o’erhead,
There was only Myself and You ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Why do I feel no fear,’ I asked,
‘ Meeting You here this way,
For I have sinned I know full well,
And is there a heaven, and is there a hell,
Or is this the Judgment Day ? ’ ”

“ ‘ Nay, those too were but dreams,’ the Great God
said,
‘ Dreams that have ceased to be.
There are no such things as fear or sin,
There is no you—you have never been :
There is *nothing at all but ME ! ’ ’ ”*

While she was reciting this, Grace Esbourne’s eyes had a far away wistful gaze in them, as though she were indeed listening to voices afar off that no ears but her own could hear. As Edna watched the lovely young face and listened with silent awe to the words of the poem, her whole soul was filled with wonder and worship—worship of the Greater Self revealed through her little sister’s soul, and wonder at the Spirit that was using that Soul for its own special revelations in such a remarkable way. Truly, she thought, He hath hidden these things from the wise and prudent and revealed them unto babes. This child was old far beyond her years, and at times she voiced thoughts that no one who knew her could conceive she had known or had ever learned during her short earth-life among them, for at this particular period she was barely fourteen.

Little Grace Esbourne was a born poetess, but very few understood the real meaning of her poems, for Gracie’s verses were filled with beautiful imagery. All her ideas were most original and expressed in such melodious rhythm that you could not but feel that the little singer mentally lived in fair palaces and

scenes of splendor, through which her rare imagination roved at will. Though the spirit of the child inhabited the frail tenement of clay, which day after day lay so inert upon its couch, the true Self of the child was but seldom there in actuality : it was roaming through its many mansions, gathering up treasures and rare gems of thought to bring back with her to earth and by her poetic gift describe them to her loved ones who were not so favored. Those who pitied little Gracie because of her physical affliction did not dream that hers was an existence less needing their pity than those who enjoyed fullness of physical powers but had empty minds or starved souls.

Since the Soul of Man is All—is his true and grandest Self and is the only thing that grows—what matter how frail and shrunken the body may be in which it temporarily abides, so long as the mind is fully developed and the soul daily unfolding ! It will then build itself a suitable body by its thought-power, for Man's soul is his power to think and consequently the only part of the man immortal which can truly develop, so that which encourages and conduces to the growth of the soul is of far more consequence than that which affects the body in which that soul dwells. The one lives in time, the other in eternity. The greatest philosopher may live in a hovel, and not be the less great—as was Diogenes, who dwelt in his tub. So great Souls often dwell in plain fleshly habitations, while many a poor, mean and paltry soul inhabits a physical palace.

“ Man is not a body with a Soul,
Nor yet a Soul with a body,
But a Spirit developing a Soul
Within an earthly tabernacle.”

This thought was passing through Edna's mind when she was aroused by Grace saying musingly :

“ Don't you think those verses of mine are something like my dream about you, Edna ?”

“ Yes, very much, Gracie dearest,” assented Edna.

"You see in my dream God and you were quite alone, I thought, and yet you did not seem a bit afraid. Wasn't it strange that I should have the same idea in two different ways?"

"Not so very strange, my pet, for I fancy that my little sister is taught by the Infinite Spirit of Wisdom Itself, which teaches our souls as none others can instruct," answered her sister, gently. "But really the lines you have just repeated to me are very beautiful, very remarkable. Where did you learn them, Gracie? Do you know who composed them?"

"No! That is just what is puzzling me," replied the child. "I am not sure whether I ever read them or heard them repeated; and I was doubtful about having composed them. I only know they have been running through my head so much lately. But," with a bright flash of inspiration, "perhaps, Edna, I knew them when I was on earth as somebody else and brought them with me when I came here as Grace Esbourne! Eh?" with a curious little smile.

"That is very likely, darling," assented Edna, humoring her quaint fancy. "Anyway, wherever they came from, I should like to keep them so that I may put them in my book of 'Thoughts'; they are well worth keeping. Will you write them out for me when you feel able, dear?"

"Oh! yes, I should like you to have them, Edna it will remind you of your wonderful revelation, won't it? Shall I do them for you now?"

"No, not now, love. I was going to tell you about a very strange experience I had when I was ill in Perth: a Vision of the Heaven Land. I have never been able to speak about it before. Now I think I understand why it was given to me. It was for a purpose, and perhaps a greater purpose than I know as yet."

"Oh! Edna, why didn't you tell me about it long ago? You know I love dreams and visions. I think they are our real lives, and this—well this is only the illusion." Then, laughingly, "Why, that's what this

world of ours is, and your last name means, 'Màyà,' illusion. I read about it in a book the other day. Did you know, Edna? "

"Yes, I knew, dear," said her sister, smiling, "but it also means something else better than that."

"What is it? Tell me."

"Not now, pet; here comes Mother and Ella. I'll go and get my work and come back by-and-bye and tell you about my vision. But before I go I want you to promise me that you will keep my secret all to yourself. I cannot tell the others what I have told you and what I am going to tell you. It is too sacred. You will be silent, Gracie, I know."

"Yes, of course I shall, dear Edna. But you will come and talk to me about your great and grand new thoughts when you feel you want to, will you not? " wistfully looking up into her sister's face and holding her hand as she spoke. "Edna" promise you will share all you learn with me, because I do want to know more about these things if I can."

"You can and you will, little sister, for Desire is Prophecy. I shall only be too pleased to come and share my spiritual feasts with you." Then stooping quickly, she kissed her cheek and left the room just as her mother and sister Ella entered through the verandah door, laughing together over something they were bringing in with them to show Grace.

From that day the elder and younger sister were more to each other than mere sisters. There was a freemasonry between them that was as sweet as it was sacred. Whenever Edna could manage to get an hour with Grace alone and free from interruption, she would open the subjects their hearts loved best and discuss the degree of growth she had made in the New Thought, though at that time she did not even know that it was called by that distinctive name: it was only that it was *new* to them. They had no books upon it except the Bible and the book which Edna had first studied and which was the key to her great revelation.

So the two young truth-seekers had to glean in what fields were open to them and make use of what good seed they found. But it was nevertheless remarkable how large a harvest of new-old ideas they garnered, and when they had discussed them together, after asking for light and guidance from the Spirit of all Wisdom, what great life and beauty came into Bible texts and passages which were once dark and unmeaning to them.

By this means their souls developed, and to the elder sister especially wisdom and revelation came in a remarkable degree, till her whole soul was flooded with new life and Love. Then suddenly "*those* who sat in darkness saw a great and wondrous light" and she knew that she was "One of Those."

CHAPTER VI.

A VISION OF THE HEAVEN-LAND.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. But God hath revealed them unto us by His spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea the deep things of God."—I. Cor. ii, 9 and 10.

Later that same afternoon, Edna came with her work as promised and, seating herself by the side of her sister's couch, which had been wheeled out upon the wide shady verandah, set herself to relate to Gracie her wonderful vision of the Heaven-Land.

"You already know, dear, from what mother has told you all, that I was very ill when my little baby was born: so ill, indeed, that they did not think that I should recover, and I ———, well I did not wish to get better." This with faltering voice and tones that quivered in spite of her effort to appear calm, for this was a subject that Edna never discussed under any circumstances, but to-day she wished to gratify her little sister by relating this most remarkable experience through which she had passed, and which was a mystery to herself that had never yet been properly

explained to her satisfaction. She never would believe that it was a dream, because it was so realistic, so vivid in all its detail, and filled her with such a sense of spiritual elation as she had never experienced in all her life before. Indeed, if at any time she found herself looking back regretfully into the dark pages of the past and wishing life had been otherwise for her, there was a consciousness within her that she was being false to her true self, to her Lord, and losing sight of the promise given her in the vision.

"I must tell you, Gracie," Edna resumed, "that I was three days and three nights in a state of such utter collapse that the doctors thought every moment would be my last, and they could only be certain that the breath of life had not left my body by holding a mirror to my lips. I now myself believe that I was really in a state of trance, and that during those three full earth days, while my physical life hung in the balance, my spirit was passing through the scenes I am about to describe to you."

"Then, Edna," exclaimed Gracie, excitedly, "it was not a dream: it was really a vision? You saw it? You were in it all?"

"Yes, dear, I know I experienced it, as I am going to tell you," replied Edna, "but you will not interrupt dear, for while I relate it to you I will go through it in fancy again. I wrote it down when I was well enough to do so, just as it was revealed to me, so as I should remember it clearly. But there was hardly any need to take such a precaution, for it was so impressive that I found myself constantly thinking over it, and at times when I was very weak I fancied that I had really died and was resting for a season in that heavenly place. Even now I fancy I can see it all again, only that it is not with the same realism, nor are the scenes so vividly recalled to my mind, yet in memory I can go through them and once more experience that glorious sensation of peace and rest that fell upon me while there. I have not now, though, the same sense of awed admiration such as

filled my whole soul and flooded my entire being when I first beheld the wonders that burst upon my view, and the glories which were revealed to me during that never-to-be-forgotten time when I was transported beyond the open Portals of the Heaven-Land ! ”

Then with her hands folded in her lap and her eyes gazing away into the far distance beyond the homestead garden, across the cleared stretches of pasture lands to where the vast primeval bush stretched away, away into the unknown distance, and the tops of the tall gum-trees seemed to meet the sky line, where earth and sky were wedded, Edna, in soft even tones, related to her listening sister Grace the description of her vision, which she gave in the following words and style, speaking as though she were actually passing through it all again, so vividly did she portray the scenes of glory she now described.

THE VISION.

It was evening. The shades of night were falling when methought I was ascending a long lonely hill. Darkness was fast approaching and I was very weary and alone, only my little new born babe was close pressed to my breast ; No human help was near. Yet methought a strong invisible hand upheld me, and that an impulse which I could not resist urged me to press forward to some unknown destination, where I felt I should find rest, yet knew not why.

As my strength was fast failing and my weary eyelids were drooping, a sweet voice whispered in my ear : “ Look up ! Press forward to the light ! ”

I raised my eyes to see from whence the voice proceeded, when lo ! a glorious light streamed down upon me, more beautiful than any earthly light that I had ever seen, and more dazzling than the sun, so that my weary eyes were for the moment bereft of sight and I could not gaze upon it nor yet discover from whence the gentle voice came. Presently I gained sufficient confidence and strength to open my eyes and look upon the light. Then it seemed to me that it

streamed from the summit of the hill which I was then ascending.

While I stood transfixed by the sudden brilliancy of that marvellous illumination, a sound reached my ears as though a myriad harps were simultaneously touched to some sweet tune, and an accompaniment of voices burst forth into melodious song. As I stood listening a strong desire seized me to reach the brow of the hill and behold the performers on these instruments, and the great longing to join them lent new strength to my sinking frame. I again attempted to press forward, when the gentle voice which had previously addressed me spoke once more in these words:

“Behold the Father’s house of many mansions! The Home prepared for the children of God. The city of the Great King!”

Again I sought for the form of the speaker, but found none, and as the Voice paused a sudden terror seized me and my limbs trembled so that I could not move or speak. Then I raised my eyes once more towards the summit of the hill, when, behold! there burst upon my wondering eyes a brilliancy and beauty; a glory past description. As I looked upon it the darkness and loneliness of the road I had been traversing suddenly vanished and all around me this glorious light streamed, so dazzlingly powerful and all-illuminating in its wondrous brilliancy that I forgot, as I gazed spell-bound, that I had just emerged in weariness and despair, from the depths of a Stygian darkness.

Suddenly the music and singing which I had heard in the distance ceased, and there followed a silence that could almost be felt. My eyes had now grown accustomed to the scene, and, looking upward and forward along the path I trod, I beheld wide open before me the portals of a beautiful city. The main road leading from the gates was paved with gold. On each side were green fields, through which ran streams of rippling water, clear as crystal, on whose banks grew luxuriant trees laden with fruits resembling apples of silver. At the top of this golden street I beheld

a great white throne, pure and glistening as the newly fallen snow, and from this stately throne streamed forth that wondrous Light—a light sufficiently strong in itself to illumine all worlds.

When I, with my weak finite vision, endeavored to distinguish more clearly the outlines of the great white throne, the light blazed forth upon me with still more dazzling brightness and my eyes were unable to look upon all the revealed glories of this heavenly scene. Then, once again, the music burst forth, but this time it seemed much nearer than before, and louder and stronger; yet still possessing the same rare sweetness which first entranced my ear.

Then, O! Glorious Vision! I beheld a mighty host! Ten thousand times ten thousand angel forms were all hovering upon the wing, circling in halos of brilliant light around the great white throne. Ten thousand times ten thousand angel voices were all united in that joyous strain, and ten thousand times ten thousand harps were touched to that entrancing melody. The song they were singing was one of rejoicing, and they told in the words of the measure the story of their own redemption. Then I knew that these were they who had triumphed over much tribulation and had won the white robes which they wore through great suffering and now were accounted worthy to stand in the presence of Him who sat upon the great white throne, whose face I could not distinguish because of the dazzling brightness of the light that beamed upon me. Glory, glory, glory, honour, praise and power was the burden of their song.

The robes they wore were long and flowing and each one had upon his head a crown of pure gold most beautiful to behold, for in them shone bright gems which sparkled and twinkled like stars. Some crowns had many gems and some had but few. Each one carried a shining harp upon which they played this entrancing music.

For a very long time I stood transfixed with admiration and awe, gazing upon this wondrously beautiful scene and watching the movements of the heavenly throng. My sleeping babe was still close pressed to my breast, but I had forgotten all weariness in earnest contemplation of these glories which had burst upon my wondering view, when once more I was roused by the same gentle voice saying :—" Will you not pass through the gates of the city ? "

I started, for the voice was very close to my ear, but, gaining courage, I looked hastily round, when I saw standing close beside me one of the singers from the ranks of that white-robed throng. As I looked earnestly upon his countenance I beheld one whose features I seemed to know well, one who had some connection with my life in a former existence, I thought. He it was who now stood by my side to help and encourage me along the last portion of the steep and rugged road I was treading to the open gates of the beautiful city. Oh ! how wondrously his face now shone, with a soft luminous glow that was never seen on any earthly countenance. The recognition between us was mutual, and, realizing that, I gained courage to address him, and in reply to his question as to whether I would not wish to enter the city, said :

" Yes, gladly would I pass through, but the light is so bright that it dazzles my eyes and I fear to go alone. My babe, too, is heavy and my body so weary that I long for rest."

He smiled kindly upon me as he answered :
" Come, my child, I will be your guide. Have no fear. Look ever forward, not behind. Keep only the light in view."

Then taking me by the hand, he led me to the borders of the heaven-land, and I passed through the gates into the city.

As I crossed the golden threshold I dropped upon my knees and bowed my face upon that of my little child, for I was overcome with emotion at the splendor of everything around me and with a deep awe at the

sanctity of the place. A great fear seized me, fear that I was unworthy to enter, even for a moment came upon me and I dared not look up; but my guide stooped over me and whispered softly in my ear, saying: "Behold your welcome!"

Gaining confidence, as his tones now became familiar, I lifted my head and looked. Upon each side of the golden street leading from the gates of the city to the steps of the great white throne hovered angels, all upon the wing; poised in the air as in two long white rows they lined each side and seemed to be waiting for a signal. Silence, deep and solemn, reigned over the whole scene, while I knelt, a drooping, trembling figure at the portals of that marvellous city. Then as my eyes became accustomed to the dazzling light that beamed from the throne, I beheld at the foot of this great white throne a form clad in shining raiment, a crown upon His head and in it shone myriads of jewels which twinkled like stars; these, methought, represented the spirits of those whom He had redeemed by His wonderful sacrifice of Himself for the world, for I knew as I gazed upon Him that He was the great Elder Brother of all Souls, the Lord Jesus Christ, who was the first perfected expression of the Infinite in the finite: God made manifest in Man, that He was the God-Man and the world's Lord and acknowledged Saviour.

There I beheld Him whom my soul had long panted after as the hart after the water-brooks, and my heart bowed down in reverent worship before Him as He stood, a glorious vision, His hands outstretched to receive me, and methought His tender loving heart pitied my weakness. As I looked earnestly upon Him I saw the marks the crown of thorns had left upon His brow, and in the palms of His outstretched hands the prints of the cruel nails; and as I looked I remembered what He had suffered while He sojourned on earth to teach us by His life and example how to attain to the kingdom of heaven which He told us lay within us. As I sadly gazed at these marks of the

great sacrifice, my eyes filled with tears at the remembrance that I had not profited by the teachings He had left for my guidance in the way I might have done. At sight of my grief, an angel from among the white-robed host flew towards me and gently took from my arms my sleeping babe, and as he did so (I being reluctant to let her go) he whispered reassuringly : "Leave her with us. Fear not, mourn not, but trust and know that here she is safe from all harm."

With a glad smile I looked up through my tears and yielded the child to the angel's care. Then he who had been my guide up the steep hill came forward and said : "Come !"

"Oh," I cried, regretfully, "must I go away? Am I not to stay?"

"Wait! You will learn your destiny," he answered.

Then he raised me tenderly in his arms and, taking wing, bore me along the golden street, through the marshalled ranks of the hovering angel hosts, right up to the steps of the great white throne, before which the Lord was standing, and laid me at the feet of Christ, who instantly stooped and, taking me by the right hand, raised me upon my feet, and looking tenderly, compassionately into my face, in tones sweet and comforting to a sad and weary heart, said unto me :

"Fear not, but be strong to endure all things. Go forth boldly, fearlessly, unto the end, for your rest is not yet. Remember I am with you always, the same yesterday, to-day and forever."

As the last reassuring words fell upon my ears the angel host burst forth into loud and glorious songs of praise, and, soaring upon the wing, their melodies seemed to float into the far distance till they gradually died away altogether.

Then the whole scene changed and I found myself alone in a vast garden which opened into extensive park-lands that stretched down to the banks of a swiftly-flowing river.

It was evening once again and the shadows amongst the trees were deepening, yet a faint crimson glow on the far-distant horizon tinged with glory the sylvan scene. I wandered through the garden aimlessly in my search for something I had missed. Then I remembered it was my little child. I longed for one last look at her baby face, and to kiss once more the soft sweet lips. I sought in every nook and corner, under every bush and tree, but found her not. Then I reached a small wicket gate, which opened into the park beyond, and as I peered eagerly, anxiously, across the woodlands I beheld numerous little white-winged forms flitting hither and thither among the trees. Then my heart leaped with glad anticipation, for I fancied that I should find my lost one among them.

Swiftly I hastened through the gate and across the green sward, threading my way among the great spreading trees, and never even stopping to admire the beauties of that fair spot, nor to enjoy the peaceful calm of those sheltered glades, so eager was I to complete my search ere darkness should quite close in upon me. But at length I paused, for it suddenly dawned upon me that I was getting no nearer to those groups of happy children, whose forms I could still distinguish flitting among the trees and whose silvery laughter I could even hear floating towards me on the soft evening breeze. Then I stood and gazed longingly upon that apparently near, yet distant scene, with wistful tearful eyes, when at that moment I heard a fluttering of wings near me, and, turning quickly, I beheld an angel, who proved to be the guardian of the park, standing close beside me, who questioned me gently and asked, "Why roamed I there?"

"I am seeking for my little child, whom I left in the heaven-land," I answered.

"How knowest thou that thy little child is here? How camest thou here, being, as thou art, a denizen of earth?"

"I have been in the heavenly city and have seen the Lord Christ, who gave me words of encouragement and bade me return, as my rest there was not yet," I replied.

"Thou art not obeying the command," he remarked, looking at me gravely. "This is not the way thou shouldst go."

"Ah! but my babe was taken from my arms there by an angel and I did not take a farewell of her. I only seek one last look at her before I depart; and, alas! I have lost my guide."

"I will be your guide now," he said. "Come with me and I will lead thee to the borders of the earth-land." And as he spoke he took my hand and shadowed me with his great white wing.

"But my child!" I protested. "I want to see my little babe once more."

"That may not be," he answered calmly. "You must be content to leave her with us, where she will be transplanted into the Master's garden of souls and there kept safe from all harm," and while speaking thus he still led me on.

Just then my eyes caught sight of a tiny angel form seated beneath a tree some distance away, its little wings folded and bowed head drooping upon its breast, fast asleep. I knew it instantly, and, breaking away from my guide's detaining hand, I sprang across the sward to the spot where the little one sat quietly sleeping. But, alas! before I could reach its side his great white wings enveloped me and shut out the fair vision of my child, while his strong arms lifted me bodily from the spot and bore me swiftly to the river's brink, where, on looking, I beheld a bridge on which he placed me and then stood with wings outstretched, guarding the approach to the coveted shore, while he said kindly yet in authoritative tones: "Return thou to earth. Your home is not yet here. Your work there is as yet unfinished. Go, complete it faithfully. Have no fear, your little child is safe; you shall see her again."

" Oh ! do not send me away ! " I cried, stretching out my arms towards him as he stood on the shore of the beautiful country I had just left. " Let me come back," I pleaded. " Earth has no charm for me now. I am so weary, so sad-hearted and I long only for rest, for peace, for home ! "

But the angel raised his hand as he stood on the bank of that swiftly-flowing river, and in solemn tones replied, "*Not yet.*"

Then slowly the bridge, in the centre of which I stood, divided, and the portion between me and the heaven-land dropped down into the waters below and only the half leading to Earth was before me, and I had no alternative but to retrace my steps to the Shadow Land once more. Then as darkness gathered fast around me, blotting out the fair shores beyond where my loved one now abode, I remembered the words of the Lord Christ, " Fear not, but be strong to endure ; I am with thee always ! " Bowing my head in silent resignation, I turned with slow and semi-reluctant footsteps and sought the precincts of this world once more, but now filled with a strength and power of endurance such as the world could never conquer and no human experience crush.

When the reaper came and garnered in my only flower, my little firstborn child, I knew that it was done in love and that all was well, for the words of the angel comforted me :

" Have no fear, your little child is safe ; you shall see her again."

Yes, my little bud is safe in the garden of God.

And now, Gracie, dear little sister, I can wait for the dawning of that morning in faith and strong hope, " For of such is the Kingdom of Heaven," said the Master."

CHAPTER VII.

A NEW INFLUENCE.

"Thought is valuable to feeling, and feeling is valuable to thought. You could not get a knowledge of God through your head alone. The knowledge of God comes to you through those wonderful inspirational influences which act upon the emotional, and through the emotional upon the active life, but the inspirations have to be sifted, the spirits have to be tried."

—SELECTED.

Three years later a new and strong influence came into Edna Esbourne's life. Her father had been home to England on a trip, and was returning, accompanied by his younger son Frank, who, after finishing his course at Sydney University, proceeded to Oxford to take his degrees and fit himself for the legal profession.

On their way back to Australia they came through America, and it was during the voyage from San Francisco, that Mr. Esbourne encountered among the passengers on board a gentleman whom he had met six or seven years before and who had spent a couple of days with them at "Cumbooquepa" Station, while making a tour through the central districts of New South Wales with the object of gleanng information relative to the Closer Settlement Scheme, which was then before the Government, and which he, as a writer and journalist, took great personal interest in at the time. The two gentlemen soon renewed acquaintance and before the vessel reached Sydney Heads they looked upon each other as old friends, while, owing to the fact that Frank had been a Fellow of Wadham College, in Oxford—which proved to be the same one as their new friend had passed through as a young man there were many topics of mutual interest to all three in the course of the voyage home.

It was now about the middle of October and springtime in Australia. Mr. Esbourne had persuaded their friend to pay them a visit for a couple of months if possible and get a thorough insight into life on a station, and he would also have an opportunity of seeing the country at its best. This very pressing in-

visitation was willingly accepted and it was then arranged that when the travellers reached Sydney they should journey to Wagga Wagga together as proposed.

Mr. Roger Joshua Northbrook was a man of about thirty-three years of age, of fine presence and impressive manner ; calm and sedate, deliberate in speech and demeanor ; thoughtful and intensely earnest upon all subjects affecting the welfare of man as an individual, a community, a nation, and a race. He was well and favorably known in the world of high-class journalism ; wrote leading articles for the best journals and newspapers, chiefly of a conservative character, was most advanced in his views and in touch with the times. His pen dealt ably with all matters that affected the progress of his adopted country, Australia ; but his standpoint was always that of the Englishman who sees the colonies and estimates their importance much as a father looks upon a son who needs paternal guidance and occasional control, to check his precociousness, and bring him to a sense of his dependence ; though he may also admit that there is a big possibility of his being a good asset in the future. Roger Northbrook had none of that optimism regarding Australia generally which is so inseparable from the true-born colonial, who sees his glorious new country with the eyes of the prophet and proclaims her " The Wonder Land of the South."

Mr. Northbrook had been to England to publish his last book, entitled " Coming Events," a powerful political romance into which he had woven the politics of the present and those which he considered should prevail in the future if the country was to justify the Motherland's confidence and support. This was so effectively dealt with and so ably, yet simply, unfolded that the problems of the day were made easy to the simplest mind of the dullest citizen who cared to make himself familiar with these vital issues in the destiny and progress of a young country. This book was really a prophecy in politics and in some instances has since been largely verified.

Being a man of independent means, Mr. Roger Northbrook had extended his visit to England and spent three years in travel, and, indeed, only decided to return to Australia's shores again because he could not rest or settle in other lands. He had gone away partly to try and forget a certain episode in his life that had left a disturbing influence upon his heart and mind. A restlessness had taken possession of him and there was a shadow on his heart, a shadow which refused to be dispelled by change of scene or even by Time, the great healer.

His was not one of those fluctuating characters that are easily driven hither and thither by passion or impulse. On the contrary, it was one of great determination, even of self-sufficiency, in everything but the one matter that was now disturbing his otherwise well-balanced mind. But the heart-yearning for something that he could not find abroad for the time made him a puppet to the desire that ruled him. So to satisfy that yearning or kill it completely he wandered back again to Australia's sunny shores.

Mr. Roger Northbrook had no relatives in Sydney with the exception of a cousin, Mr. Edward Carlyon, who was a well-known wool-broker in the city. His beautiful home, situated at Mosman's Bay, just across the harbor, was always open to the wanderer when he felt disposed to claim its hospitality. His cousin's wife invariably gave him a warm welcome, as also did the children, to whom he was known familiarly as "Uncle Roger," and for whom he never forgot to lay in a stock of presents when away on his travels.

When the American mail boat arrived at Circular Quay, Mr. Carlyon was on the wharf to welcome his cousin back and take him home with him, as he quite expected he would stay with them, and "Evelyn was expecting him, as well as the 'kiddies,' who would be terribly disappointed if he did not turn up," he announced. When aware of the fresh arrangements made since he left San Francisco, and introduced to the friends with whom he was going up-country, it

was discovered that they already knew each other, having had business relations with Mr. George Esbourne for several years, for Mr. Esbourne had been in the habit of consigning his yearly wool-clip to Mr. Carlyon for shipment to England.

The squatter's eldest son, Leonard, had come down to meet his father and brother and had arranged for them to stay that night with some friends on Potts Point, and leave by the night express the following day. This consequently, gave Roger Northbrook an opportunity of spending the evening with his cousin and family.

"So you're going up to 'Cumbooqueepa' Station on a long visit?" remarked Mrs. Carlyon, when she heard of the altered arrangements. "I hope you'll be back to spend Christmas with us, though. We're going to the Mountains this year."

"I will, if possible," replied Roger. "I would not have gone away so soon after my return, only that Mr. Esbourne was so pressing and wished me to be there before the shearing was quite over."

"I'm afraid you'll be late, then," interposed Mr. Carlyon, "for I've had a large consignment of their wool down already. That son Leonard is a fine fellow and, it appears, has managed splendidly during his father's absence."

"Oh! I shall not mind very much. I'll be glad to get away from civilization. I've had a surfeit of cities lately," said Roger Northbrook, with a shrug.

"I'm sure you're not getting away from civilization at 'Cumbooqueepa,' for it's a most up-to-date station and really a very fine place in every way. I have met Mrs. Esbourne and she is a splendid woman, and the family are exceedingly nice and quite out of the ordinary, I believe," remarked Mrs. Carlyon.

"Yes, from what I remember of them I think they impressed me favorably on my last visit. But when I was there before it was the district I was most interested in," returned Roger.

"Oh! of course. I recollect your saying something about them when you returned. You were gathering materials for your new book at that time were you not?" said his cousin, as, rising from the table, they both repaired to the smoking-room to enjoy a cigar together, while Roger related the events of his three years' wanderings in other lands. As he drew to the end of his narrative and stated that he could not settle in England, as he had purposed doing when he went away, his cousin remarked, laughingly, as he passed the whiskey decanter and cigars towards Roger:

"Ha, ha! and so after all you've been glad to wander back again to the Bush-land. Well, I don't blame you, my boy, for after all there's not another country like it on earth to the out-and-out Australian."

"But I'm not an Australian. I'm an Englishman to the backbone," protested Mr. Northbrook.

"Yes," laughed Mr. Carlyon, with a twinkle in his eye, knocking the ash off his cigar as he spoke, "but with strong Australian proclivities. What you really want now, Roger, is a true Australian woman for a wife, to make you as thorough a colonial as any boasted thoroughbred in the country."

"I'm not looking for matrimony at present, Ted," responded Roger, smiling.

"That's a pity, then, seeing that you're going up to 'Cumbooquepa.' I hear that Mr. Esbourne's daughters are very fine girls. I don't know why it is you're always against Australian women; you ought to have brought your paragon of an English girl back with you as a wife, and then find she'd do nothing but grumble at the climate from daylight to dark," remarked his cousin, banteringly.

"I don't know why you're so awfully anxious to see me married Ted," laughed Roger.

"Oh! my dear fellow, a man's only half a man till he's properly mated. Take my advice and put aside your prejudice against Australians and take unto yourself a wife from among the daughters of Australia."

"You are greatly mistaken, Ted. I'm not set against Australian women in the least," responded Roger. "On the contrary, I consider there are some very fine women among them: women who do their duty nobly and unostentatiously in the particular walks of life they are called to. Indeed, I have met some true heroines in my short bush excursions."

"I thought you considered them much too independent and self-assertive?"

"I did at one time, I think, voice such views, but that was some years ago, and my experience was rather limited, I'll admit. But even now I consider their style rather loud and their manners aggressive; but that is largely due to the inborn spirit of independence which is the heritage of every Australian woman, as it also is of her American cousin. But it is born of a consciousness of their own worth, which engenders self-respect, and correspondingly commands the respect of others. This includes our sex, too, for it is inevitable that when a woman sets a high value upon herself you'll always find a man according her respect and even reverence, where once he only gave patronage and protection," affirmed Roger Northbrook, with an air of conviction.

"Why! you have surely joined the cause of Woman's Suffrage since you left us!" exclaimed Mr. Carlyon, amusedly.

"No. I've joined no Cause, nor yet openly espoused one," replied his cousin, "But I admit that in some respects I have altered my opinions about women, and am much more in sympathy with their claims generally, than I was."

"Then you agree with them having the vote?" cried Ted—then added, pouring himself out a nip of whiskey, "Anyway, whether you or I agree or not, they've got it here now." Then tossing off his drink, he added, "Here's that they may make good use of it too!"

"They will! It's the first step to a better state of things and at any rate will give a moral uplift to politics," cried Roger.

"I doubt it. They're not ready for it yet," asserted his cousin.

"Then if you wait till they are, and continue to refuse it on those contentions, they will never be ready. If the world had been forced to wait till it was ready for the advent of the Teacher of Nazareth, He would never have been here yet. The necessity creates the ability or at least calls it forth. Give woman freedom and she will show us a new way. But woman's freedom in every respect is born of her independence. Where there is lack of independence there can be no true self-respect, and without both there cannot be freedom of thought and action, and consequently no development either mentally or morally. I consider that women should have the opportunities in life that men have," asserted Mr. Northbrook.

"They have, surely?" contended Mr. Carlyon, "especially when you remember the educational system as it is to-day, that allows our girls to fit themselves for nearly all the professions on equal terms with men."

"I do not overlook that fact," admitted Roger, "but that is not quite what I refer to when I speak of woman's freedom. It is the lack of freedom in their general environment, the thought atmosphere about them, that hinders their development. They have to suppress their best impulses and smother their original ideas *because* they are women, and being such are expected to walk in a beaten track or act in a certain way that custom has laid down for them. Yet if free to think untrammelled they are capable of conceiving higher and loftier ideals than any man could ever aspire to, let alone express. What women are to-day is due to their own individuality. They have had to fight for every inch of ground they have won, and they have fought against terrible odds too, for, apart from having the opposite sex to contend with, they have had to fly in the face of custom and tradition and

the censure of their fellow-women—those who have not yet awakened from the sleep of moral slavery and mental inertia, in which generations of suppression have wrapped them.”

“ Well, from recent events in the world of modern women, they appear to me now to be very much awake ! ” exclaimed Mr. Carlyon.

“ They are, I tell you, Ted,” asserted Roger. “ This twentieth century will certainly see a great revolution in the condition of Woman. I for one will welcome it, because I recognise that we as men have been trying to run the world in a very one-sided fashion. Hence the mess we have got it into, both politically, socially and morally. On the physical plane of existence we are all right, for we are naturally tillers of the soil, like Adam, and builders, as was Joseph. But we want our Mary, too, the Woman Nature in us, to show us the way, to reveal the Master. We have been trying to do our own work and woman’s also. We have taken her from her place in the creative plan by thinking she was but given us for our comfort and amusement when *our* work was done. But I tell you, Ted, we have been making a great mistake. We have been working with only one half of ourselves ; the woman is the other half, and the only way to get peace is to try and understand our helpmate—Woman. But we shall never be able to understand her ; she will remain a mystery till she chooses to reveal herself, and that will never be till she has perfect freedom.”

“ Well, hasn’t she freedom now that she has the vote and lots of other advantages she never had before ? ” interjected Ted.

“ No. Under the present social conditions she is like a bird in a beautiful cage : she has everything *but* her freedom. Then in consequence of her forced confinement all her habits, and in fact her whole nature, is altered. Give her full freedom and she will live according to the nature which is hers by right—not the warped and artificial one which the majority of the sex have now. She may make a few mistakes, but

what of that?—so has man made many in learning what he knows to-day. But the true emancipation of Woman will be the only thing that can ever bring about the regeneration of Man. There is only one saviour for Man, and that is *Woman!*” affirmed Roger Northbrook, earnestly.

“By jove, Roger! you have altered. What on earth has come over you? I declare that you, of all men, have become a flaring woman’s champion!” cried Mr. Carlyon.

“Not a champion in the popular acceptance of the term, but a man who recognises Woman’s true place in the Divine Creative Plan,” corrected Roger, smiling.

“Oh, call it what you like! I consider you’re a dangerous person now to let loose in a married man’s home; you would upset the old order of things completely, then where would the family life of the nation be, I’d like to know? Why, we benedicts are the backbone of the nation and the support of society. Yet here are you bachelors, who never move your little fingers to improve the conditions of the community in which you live, or add to the lawful population of the State, with the audacity to stand up and voice such heretical sentiments! Why, if the women were to get wind that a man even believed them, let alone championed them, they would break loose and our pretty little castles of peace and our homes of luxurious ease and pleasure would be pulled down about our ears! For mercy’s sake, Roger, don’t let me hear you talking to the wife on these subjects—not that she’d be likely to take much notice of them, of course—but it’s just as well to be on the safe side!”

“Ha, ha, ha!” laughed Roger Northbrook, softly, “that’s very good, Ted. I couldn’t have had better proof of the truth of my remarks than those words of yours. You give the whole sex away, for you prove that it is nothing but man’s absolute selfishness that keeps woman in the position in which she has been held so long. Your very fear of losing what you have for

ages enjoyed at the cost of another's sacrifice makes you even now tremble at the idea of being deprived of it. But you really only relinquish the unwilling slave for the greater joy of receiving the true helpmeet and partner."

"Oh, well, I am used to the old ways and I tell you I'm very well satisfied. I don't want to change for any of the new-fangled notions. Let well alone, is my motto," said his cousin.

"Yes, you are like the Churches over this New Thought movement. They have been giving the people husks so long that when someone comes along and offers them bread that they find feeds their hungry souls and bodies also, and the people gladly devour this living bread and reject the dry husks of dogma and tradition, the Churches forget their own teachings of patience, love and tolerance, and rise up in a body to decry that which they do not understand and cannot in any case supply to the starving souls under their charge. Now when they find they are losing their congregations they tremble for their own livings, and with desperate efforts strive to make their husks look like bread. But it is a huge failure, for the people know the difference too well already. So it is with your position as married men nowadays: the sensible women see the difference between married slavery and single freedom, and they naturally prefer the latter. Then never mind how alluring you may make your bait, they will not take it, for they know the cost. Therefore, those of you who have fish already on the hook are most anxious that they shall stay there, and be kept in blissful ignorance of any other more comfortable condition of existence for mind and body."

Roger Northbrook laughed as he glanced quizzically at his cousin Edward, who sat opposite him with knit brows, eyeing the returned traveller with new interest, trying to fathom this change that had come over the once quiet and rather cynical Roger. At last he said:

"Have you got tainted with this New Thought, too? I suppose you got that in America. I believe it is the birthplace of such heresy?"

"Yes, I admit I am 'honeycombed' with it, as a well-known clergyman in England admitted his church was when he wrote to one of the New Thought leaders and asked for a batch of the best New Thought literature to enable him to understand the reason for so many seceders from the ranks of his congregation to that of the 'heretics,' as you call them. But from what I have learned lately I for one would much rather be permeated with these grand new-old truths than be as I was for many years, a half-hearted believer in what we understood as church doctrines. A man feels like a child who is supposed to believe in nursery fables after he has grown out of them. It is this hypocrisy that keeps so many men like you and me away from church nowadays. Why, my dear Ted, it is an insult to our reason to ask us to believe in what we as thinking intelligent beings cannot possibly bring ourselves to believe—in fact do not believe—without being rank hypocrites."

"Well, you must admit that some of us play the hypocrite very well for the sake of what we get by it. Yet I notice that the less we have to gain by the game the less frequently we play it," observed his cousin, shrugging his shoulders.

"True," returned Roger, "yet not one out of every ten thinking men who attend church regularly believe with their whole heart and mind the story in its literal rendering on which our Christian religion is founded. It is admittedly against their reason, and what is contrary to a man's reason is not true belief. It is but a half-hearted conforming to custom and following traditions, or else it is a mere form and ceremony taken part in without troubling to think about it sufficiently to convince himself what it is he actually does believe in, if anything better indeed than the almighty dollar."

"Well, that's coming it a bit strong against religion, isn't it, old fellow?" ventured Ted.

"If religion is all she is claimed to be, nothing that you or I can say for or against her will move her. But now look here. You'll admit yourself, Ted, that you really only go to church to please Evelyn? Now own up!" laughed Roger, as he watched the serious expression on his cousin's face when he voiced these startling heresies.

"We—ll, yes ——," hesitatingly; then more readily, "Yes, I admit you are certainly right when I come to think of it. I do go to please the wife and to set a good example to the children. Then, of course, I would also go because it is my duty and it would not be considered respectable to stay away from church altogether," admitted Mr. Carlyon.

"Just so. You are at least honest, Ted. And if you were given your choice and followed your inclinations only, where would you spend Sunday mornings, for I know you never go in the evening," queried Roger.

"Why, here, smoking or reading, to be sure, or perhaps on a fine morning in the garden or off for a good canter on Prince," replied his cousin, frankly.

"Yes, and the latter would do your soul and body more good, I am certain, than sitting for an hour or more in a place where you have no real interest in being, and are only conforming to custom. I tell you that people are learning the truth of the sayings of the Prophet of Nazareth that "The Kingdom of Heaven is within you." We have been looking into an imaginary place in the sky for the Kingdom, which would be reached only through death, while all the time it has been at our very doors, or "within" us. I have come to the conclusion that man's greatest kingdom is to know his own power, and that will give him the dominion for which he craves over all that obstructs his path of ascension to greater things."

"Then you would do away with the idea of

Heaven as a place to dwell in when we leave this world?" suggested Mr. Carlyon.

"Certainly," replied Roger. "Heaven and Hell are states of consciousness, and every man makes his own heaven or his hell by the power of thought and the acts which follow it. As one of the sages puts it, 'Each man is his own absolute law-giver, the decreer of glory or gloom to himself, his reward, his punishment.'"

"If that were the case, then we would be as gods," said Ted.

"And so we are. But we have never recognised it before. We have been too busy calling ourselves 'poor worms of the dust,' and of course according to our word it has been unto us. This is the fulfilment of the prophecy of the serpent in Eden. We are proving the truth for ourselves. Also that which the Christ of Judea taught in his days. Now we are really in the last days, and can look for the coming of the kingdom—that is, each man will find it within himself."

As he spoke, he looked at his watch, and rose in dismay, exclaiming, "Nearly eleven o'clock! How the time has passed! I must go or I'll miss my boat. No, thank you, Ted, I'll not stay to-night. I've sent my bag on to the club: it will be handier for to-morrow. I'll go and say good-night to Evelyn."

As they parted at the gate, Mr. Carlyon said eagerly, while the cousins shook hands:

"Do try and come to us for Christmas when you return from 'Cumbooqueepa'! I shall be glad to renew the conversation of to-night, though I must confess you are very daring in some of your statements, yet you have given me something to think about and that in itself is something nowadays in this hoary old world, when we too echo Solomon's wisdom, that "There is nothing new under the sun."

"Good! I'm very glad I've had the power to set you thinking, Ted. Once I was as you are yourself, but recently I have found quite another point of view in life, and that everything is good, is fresh and new

each day, if we will only learn to *think it so*. Yes, I'll try and come to you for Christmas. Good-night ! ”

The following evening he was speeding inland as fast as express train could take them to Wagga Wagga, a township near the borders of New South Wales and Victoria. Here they would be met with the buggy and driven to “Cumbooqueepa” Station, distant some twenty-five miles from the township.

“Cumbooqueepa” Station was a very extensive pastoral property, comprising about 300,000 acres of good pasture land. The commodious homestead stood on a pretty rising knoll which took in a distant view of the Murrumbidgee River from one point, while another overlooked miles of well-grassed paddocks, flanked by the bush stretching away to the far-distant hills. Mr. Esbourne's stock consisted chiefly of the best breed of Merino sheep, although he also bred cattle and horses on a smaller scale, and more as a hobby and for his own use about the station. But his stud rams were his chief pride, and the boast of the district. He spared neither money nor trouble over their selection, and consequently carried off the prizes at the agricultural shows, while his clip was generally a good one and the quality of the wool the finest.

Shearing was only just over when Roger Northbrook arrived at the Station, so that the place, which at that season of the year was like a hive of bees, was now comparatively quiet, and those who were then employed were mostly regular hands. Yet they comprised a little colony in themselves and were a class distinct from others, for here was found the true type of Australian bushman at home. Surrounding the homestead were orchards and gardens, while farther away again were the wool sheds, branding yards, shearing sheds, with all the latest machinery fitted for stripping the golden fleece from the sheep's back in the shortest possible time. Barns, storehouses, dairy, piggeries, and the innumerable other appurtenances inseparable from a well-managed and flourishing sheep station met the eye all round in their own

correct order, while the well-built cottages of the numerous station hands, clustered together and resembled a miniature village. Everything bespoke wealth, opulence and excellent management, and on this his second visit to "Cumbooqueepa" Mr. Northbrook was certainly most favorably impressed with the magnitude of the place and its air of refinement, comfort and even elegance indoors.

A very warm welcome was extended to the visitor by Mrs. Esbourne and her daughters, and the returned travellers, father and son, were lovingly greeted and warmly embraced by all. The little scene was a very pleasant one to Roger Northbrook, who stood watching this effusive welcome with great interest, and for just a few moments, perhaps, a pang passed through the heart of the man, who for the first time in his life knew what it was to be lonely—yes, lonely in a crowd. He had always been sufficient unto himself and felt that his work was his best companion, for it gave him a means of expression for the thoughts that surged through his mind; so his pen had long been his mental safety-valve. But of late it had failed to console him as it had once done. He had an unsatisfied hunger in his heart, and so far had found nothing that would satiate it, or still its cravings. He had in reality come here to this out-back station, in the hope of finding fresh fields for mental occupation, and now the first scene that he is called upon to witness is one that stirs up all the awakened longings in his nature for love, sympathy and—yes, he had to admit it—congenial companionship. For the only food that would satisfy the hunger in the man's heart was Love!

Roger Northbrook was aroused from his meditations by the voice of the squatter saying:

"You have not met my eldest daughter, Mr. Northbrook. Edna was not at home when you visited us last."

Roger Northbrook turned and saw standing beside him a tall graceful woman, with sweet pale face, strongly marked and well-defined features, calm self-contained

manners and deep-set thoughtful dark eyes, shaded by long curling lashes and finely arched black eyebrows ; but with a start he remarked that this young and yet beautiful face was crowned by a halo of snow-white hair—hair that was soft, abundant and curling over brow and temples, and that certainly did not denote the weight of years, for Edna Esbourne was barely twenty-nine when Roger Joshua Northbrook thus first beheld her.

“ How d’ye do, Miss Esbourne ? ” was the only commonplace greeting that came to his lips as he took the hand she gave him in welcome, saying in a voice that was full in tone and softly musical in expression :

“ I am pleased to meet you, Mr. Northbrook, and join in welcoming you to our home, where we hope you will have a pleasant and enjoyable visit.”

Then he renewed his acquaintance with the other members of the family, all of whom he had a faint recollection of having met before, especially his hostess, whom on closer acquaintance Mr. Northbrook discovered to be a woman of exceptional qualities, embracing the attributes of a model wife and mother as well as the more modern ideas and accomplishments of the thinking woman of the present day. Well-read and exceptionally well-informed upon most subjects that affected her own sex, about whom she held very progressive views, for she was a woman who had been in the habit of thinking for herself. She had trained her children in like manner, especially her girls, by encouraging them to take an interest in things that bore upon the welfare of their country and their own part in its progress. They, too, had learned to form their own opinions early, and to express themselves upon most subjects with fairly logical precision and perspicuity. Indeed, the whole family were truly individualistic, and to Roger Northbrook this was most refreshing after the numerous copies he had been meeting in society lately, all cast, as it were, in the same mould and labelled alike ; in fact, much like the

commoner sort of merchandise imported into our States and branded "Made in Germany."

Now, however, the environment into which he had been transported thus suddenly was distinctly new, and the atmosphere of the home, together with the personalities of the occupants, so uplifting, that it was like being in another sphere. Then again, though every luxury and elegance of the present day civilization was visible throughout the establishment, these were not the paramount factors in the comfort and charm of that home; they were but secondary things to the Esbourne family. *They* were the dwellers and this was their dwelling; but you would never be likely to be more impressed with the style of the abode than with the persons who inhabited it. They were distinct and separate from their possessions! in a word, they made you feel that they owned their possessions instead of being owned by them, and were consequently of corresponding importance. Had they lived in a little suburban cottage instead of in this commodious and modernised homestead, with all the attributes of wealth evidenced around them, it would have been the same. The living beings were the principal features, and they each stamped their individuality upon everything around them. All was love and harmony and a wondrous peace seemed to fill every nook and crevice of that fine Australian homestead.

Surely Roger Northbrook was being guided by invisible hands when he turned his steps to such a haven of rest and elevating presences! This was just what his weary world-worn heart needed and his tired brain had so long sought in the mazes of literature and intellectual pursuits, which he had tried to discover by travelling far in other lands. He really hardly knew definitely what it was he wanted, only that it was an unsatisfied yearning in his breast that fame, money and change of scene and society could not fill. He had tried them each and all, but it was not till he found himself beneath the roof of this ideal home that he realized in

part what it was in life that he had missed, and he set himself to find and possess it if possible and so for ever still that dispeace in his heart.

CHAPTER VIII.

AN EARLY MORNING RIDE.

“ ’Twas merry in the glowing morn, among the gleaming grass,
To wander as we’ve wandered many a mile ;
To blow the cool tobacco smoke, and watch the white wreaths
pass,
Sitting loosely in the saddle all the while.”

—A. L. GORDON.

A few days after Roger Northbrook’s arrival at “ Cumbooqueepa ” Station, Mr. Esbourne invited him to ride round the run and get a general survey of the country it embraced. Accordingly, they started off early in the morning, not long after dawn, to avoid the heat of the noonday, and together, well-mounted, cantered over the fine well-grassed paddocks that skirted the borders of the home farm.

Shearing being over before the squatter returned home, the busiest season of the year for the pastoralist had already passed, so that there was leisure to give to other occupations, and, as all had gone off well and the yield had been a record one, which ensured good returns, there was nothing to worry the jovial and contented squatter. On this occasion Mr. Esbourne took a very pardonable pride in escorting his visitor over his extensive demesnes and pointing out the various improvements which he had made and the up-to-date appliances which he had recently introduced into all departments, while his stud sheep, which were his special hobby and in several instances had cost him two thousand guineas each, were inspected and discussed at great length, till Roger Northbrook became quite familiar with all their points and learned much that he was ignorant of during his tour of inspection with his genial host that warm November morning.

They cantered for several miles through paddocks where flocks of sheep were feeding in hundreds of thousands till the landscape seemed dotted with the woolly beasts as far as the eye could reach through the trees, till after leaving the confines of the run they emerged into what seemed open country, when the squatter exclaimed, jubilantly: "Ha, ha! Mr. Northbrook, there's a prospect for you! That's something worth looking at, eh? Just see what a fine sweep of country lies yonder, a perfect paradise for future generations. A glorious land is Australia; the greater Britain of the future, I say! What do you think of that, sir?"

As he was speaking he waved his hand in the direction of the view indicated, that took in the sweep of the vast central plains of the Riverina, which comprises quite half of the colony, stretching away in the distance as far as the eyes could see: a mighty expanse of territory, carrying very little timber, but covered in parts with a low dwarf shrub and a quantity of a species of salsify, better known as "saltbush," on which the stock feed freely, and, as it will stand any amount of heat and even thrive throughout the most severe droughts—which are very prevalent in the central districts of Australia—is of inestimable value to the pastoralist. Here and there sandstone hummocks rose, with perpendicular sides, as though formed thus by the wash of surrounding waters which had probably flowed there as an inland sea several centuries before our beautiful southern land was won from its embrace to become the home of thousands of free and independent Britons—children of her soil. To the far north-west from the point where they stood, shone the glittering waters of the Murrumbidgee River, winding through wooded banks—a truly noble stream! while beyond it the level country was broken by several thick belts of trees, which reared their tall trunks far into the ethereal blue, making a dark break on the otherwise open expanse of undulating plain. Beyond this point again rose rugged ridges, which in some

instances reached to an altitude of 1,000 to 2,500 ft. from the level of the plains. Among these desolate and bare-looking hills, or mountain spurs, the ousted aboriginal has his home. Wild, barren and fruitless are these parts, like the dying race which now finds shelter there from the onward march of civilization, which never has been a welcome note in the ears of the Australian blackfellow.

The two gentlemen had pulled up their horses on an elevated plateau, which commanded a very fine view of the surrounding country, while Mr. Esbourne described the various points of interest in the landscape for the edification of his guest, concluding with the question just propounded regarding the future of Australia, to which Mr. Northbrook replied :

"I certainly am of your opinion, Mr. Esbourne, regarding the possibilities of Australia, and commend her most laudable desire to some day attain to the commercial and national importance of the Mother Country ; but—well, as regards the probabilities—that, in my estimation, is quite a different matter, more especially under the existing state of affairs and frenzied finance. I consider it is but a vision afar off—yes," he added, with a short laugh, "yes, very far off indeed, sir." This great barren looking waste ever be like lovely rural England ? The Australian's proposition was too absurd to be seriously entertained by that true born Englishman, and his look and tone conveyed his doubt.

"Pooh !" cried Mr. Esbourne, lightly, "your vision is restricted, my dear friend, I fear ; I know you refer to the late financial crisis through which we as a country have just passed. Why, that is a mere bagatelle to a promising young land like this ! I consider it is but equivalent to a good thunderstorm on a hot sultry day, short and sharp while it lasts, but its effects are only temporary and it does a vast amount of good in the end by clearing the atmosphere of microbes and miasma. So with our recent crash : it has left its mark certainly, but, take my word for it,

Mr. Northbrook, we shall all breathe freer for its coming. Yes," he added in a tone of conviction, "there are good days in store for Australia yet. You know I have great faith in the future of my country."

"That is well spoken, and I cheerfully echo your hope as to the better days in store," returned Roger Northbrook, "but, my dear sir, they are, I fear, days which you and I will never see. There is a faint probability of our great-grandchildren being able to reap the benefits you predict from the recent financial 'thunder-storm,' as you term it, but I am convinced that this trouble has struck a blow to labor from which it will never recover; it has had a levelling effect that nothing else could possibly have achieved in the same time. Wages have fallen never to rise again to what they once were in the colonies. Hundreds, indeed thousands, of men who are not connected with the unions have been glad to accept a reduced rate of pay rather than be dismissed to fill the ranks of the unemployed. Even the recent strikes are but a feeble and ineffectual effort on the part of unionism to resist the advancing foe. It is a battle of labor against capital all the time, and labor, though superior in numbers, is lacking in true unity and proper organization, hence in time it is ultimately overcome and capital once more rises triumphant only to grind labor down still lower next time. Under these new conditions the artisan and laborer will no longer find the country what it has long been supposed to be, 'The Working Man's Paradise.' Those days are gone. Few fortunes will be won in Australia now by a blow of the pick or a turn of the shovel. Everything will have to be worked for and won by hard endeavor and solid merit, as I consider it should always be, for that is man's one and only true glory: the power of achievement, the one power that makes for progress," he concluded.

"You surely are pessimistic, Mr. Northbrook," replied the squatter. "While I know you are not a

champion of labor, being, as is natural to an Englishman, strongly conservative in policy, if not strictly so in principle, yet you must admit the power of labor in a young country like Australia. Why, the working man is the very backbone of this country, and he is the man above all others we need to make it worth while to seek our shores. What is the use of capital without labor, I'd like to know, in a land like ours ? ”

“ True ; but capital will always command labor,” returned his companion, laughing. “ I do not mean to ignore the power of the working man, yet I certainly think the capitalist is the man that is wanted here first. If the Australian Government could offer sufficient inducements to wealthy manufacturing firms in Great Britain to encourage them to set up factories here and give work to thousands of artisans and mill hands, and such like, there would be a chance of drawing workers out to the colonies from the already overcrowded districts of England. But what is the use of skilled workmen of that sort coming out here where they cannot get employment at the trades to which they are accustomed, be they ever so expert ? Besides, while your daily papers announce that each colony has already its hoards of unemployed clamoring for work, what inducement does the country offer to immigration ? Is it likely that a steady workman earning a regular wage in the Old Country, be it ever so small, will seek a new and strange one for an uncertainty ? You see for yourself that though the land is certainly an extensive one ”—sweeping his right arm across the open prospect that stretched before them—“ yet it is a comparatively barren one and only carries a population on the fringe of the coast : all the vast inner territory is a wilderness, an arid desert. Even your own great holdings, Mr. Esbourne, shew of what little value land is in Australia ; and without greater inflow of capital it will still continue to remain so. It requires capital to open it up, capital to stand the brunt of the battle against fire, flood and droughts ; then in time it would no doubt reap a rich harvest

from that sowing, but only by time and patience, remember, would even that be possible," concluded Roger Northbrook, with the air and manner of one who knows what he is talking about and upon which he had settled convictions of his own.

"I grant that what you say appears very convincing to the ordinary listener," asserted Mr. Esbourne, "but I am a man who knows my country thoroughly, and, like as a father sees the possibilities in his children while they are yet babes, I too see the great future of Australia with perspective vision. I take into account more than appears on the surface now; I reckon her great internal resources, her mineral wealth that has hardly been tapped, and which is scattered over the entire length and breadth of this fair land, and I look for the time when it will far outlast as it already rivals that of other countries. Indeed, it only awaits enterprise to open up those vast stores of mineral wealth of every description that lie hidden deep within Australia's capacious bosom. You will even admit that there are numbers of speculators in your own land who have considered Australian gold mines good enough for their money?" said Mr. Esbourne, with a humorous twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, to their great sorrow and undoing," returned Roger, smiling.

"Well, that was their greed in most cases, and if some by their folly lost, many have gained and are to-day holding good shares in many of our most flourishing mines," answered the squatter. "These may, like Australian debentures, turn out trumps yet," he added.

"For their posterity probably," admitted Roger Northbrook with a dubious glance at his host, who laughed outright at the Englishman's cynicism, while he replied cheerfully:

"Well, that's a matter yet to be proved, sir, but in any case it is my firm conviction that the Factories and Village Settlement scheme would be the right

thing for us at this juncture. We want more population, and England has too much for her resources. Instead of spending thousands in the vast charities she keeps up it would be better for the people if that same money was applied to settling them in Australia, and making them independent self-supporting human beings. Charity is a crippling agent and has a lowering effect on the race, breeding mendicants instead of men. Surely it would be better to ship whole families out here and let the Home Government support them for a time till they were able to get a start themselves, than to keep so many thousands in workhouses in England. It would give them an impetus and new interest in life that the dole received through charity, be it ever so systematically or generously bestowed, robs them of. Here, if factories were established, the raw materials we produce in such quantities (such as wool, for instance) could be manufactured, just the same as is done in the Mother Land, and this would save having to ship it Home to import it again later as clothing. As your observations pointed out just now, here there are vast tracts of country uninhabited, in fact barely explored, and there is room for millions and then land and plenty to spare. If the people were settled here and helped by the Home Government, as I have said, there would be an oversea settlement that with a little expense at the outset would in the end return a rich reward for the money invested, with the satisfaction that such money was being spent better than in putting it into workhouses, reformatories, gaols and such useless institutions that are merely monuments of the nations' errors. Give the human animal plenty of fresh air and sunshine and regular occupation and you take away the incentive to crime and obliterate the germs of disease. This to my mind is the only true means of benefiting the indigent poor and would build living monuments of peaceful industry and contentment in the hearts and homes of our fellow creatures. Were I a millionaire, Mr. Northbrook, this is what I would do with my

surplus money," concluded Mr. Esbourne enthusiastically.

"Yes, I thoroughly agree with you, sir, and consider your Village Settlement scheme a very excellent idea, but fear it would be quite impossible to carry it out. You cannot send men and their families into a barren wilderness like this and bid them settle down and form villages; why, they would rebel at the very first offset," exclaimed Roger Northbrook.

"Then tell me where did the stuff come from that formed the first pioneers of this very same country?" interposed Mr. Esbourne, warmly. "Where did such men as the early Pilgrim Fathers come from? Were they not Britons? Are there no more like them? No more such as helped to found Australia? Has England failed to produce among her myriads of sons in these latter days men like their forefathers? Surely when we, such as you and I for instance, now live in this so-called barren wilderness and succeed in supporting life well thereon, even flourish, and can also endure the conditions of such a life, are there not others in the world who can do the same? Pluck, endurance and indomitable will are not dead yet in the British race. I am certain, that if the way were but opened up for the introduction of such men as first set foot on these shores when things were much harder to contend against than they are to-day, they would risk all hardships for the sake of a glorious independence and self-respecting life in the free and open wilds of the Australian bush. Give Australia a thousand such pioneers, even as first trod her virgin shores (I do not refer to convicts only)," he added hastily, seeing the covert smile wreath the Englishman's lips at his last words, "though those who jeer at the smirch on the name that has been attached to Australia in the early days would do well to remember that it was not Australia, but England herself that bred them: England made them such by her selfish monopoly and misplaced charity, and England branded them convicts. I have no patience with those who point

the finger of scorn at those men, sent out here, as they were, for offences not by any means as heinous as are those perpetrated every day by the very ones who helped to transport them. Tell me, is it not worse to steal a woman's honor and a man's good name than a sheep or a hare off your neighbor's preserves? Some of those men who were dubbed convicts were only that in name, for at heart they were of sterling stuff, and experience brought it out in later life, as history can prove. I repeat, give Australia a thousand such men as were those early pioneers and let them have a fair start on the land, and I am willing to bet it would be one of the greatest revelations of the age, to the world, and a credit to England's progeny, being as she is the 'Mother of Nations.' "

"I certainly cannot help but admire your enthusiasm, but hardly see how your scheme would work," remarked Roger Northbrook. "Besides, have you not sufficient of such men as you mention among your own population to give the thing a fair trial? Has the early grit which distinguished the pioneers of this country leaked out of the blood of their descendants already? If so, the same thing would surely happen again, even if England were to send you a fresh batch of sturdy sons of the soil," laughed Roger, banteringly.

"That's just it," interjected the squatter. "What we actually want *is* sturdy sons of the soil, as you have just remarked. The men we have available here in any numbers are not such: they are town bred and born, they are artisans, tradesmen, laborers or even jacks-of-all trades. but not thorough out-and-out farmers or agriculturists. They lack the knowledge and necessary experience to make them successful at the first, and by the time they have gained the experience that would tend to their ultimate success they have grown weary of the effort, and lose interest which ends in their abandoning the enterprise and drifting back to the cities again to work year in and year out for a mere pittance, or else swell the ranks of the unemployed."

"Then your remarks are tantamount to an admission that the present generation of Australians are not in possession of the grit that makes pioneers; they are not capable of the endurance and perseverance necessary to face even ordinary hardships. In fact, they are a long way behind their American cousins in push and enterprise, it appears to me," remarked the Englishman.

"Oh! nonsense, Mr. Northbrook! You can never convince me that we are behind the Americans, or that we do not even compare favorably with them. They may have, as you say, ingenuity and enterprise; but we in turn have dogged determination, patience and long-suffering perseverance. If our style is a little less showy, yet we are all there in solidity, I can tell you, and we will not be beaten. Besides, we have a great deal more to contend with than they have ever had to encounter in the making of a nation. The conditions of our country are against us, yet we override even those. We have long droughts, then bush fires, and finish up the season with devastating floods! and despite all this we are flourishing and steadily progressing. Then, again, America is not so isolated as are we, besides they owe their great population to the fact that they opened their gates to all classes of people and all nations, while we demand a White Australia," concluded the squatter.

"Yes, and I must say I have no patience with these new notions of 'hold and keep.' I say, throw wide your ports to all who will come and let the country be opened up by those who are willing to do it. If your own people cannot or will not, then the land is vast enough for all, and the majority will certainly benefit in the end," Mr. Northbrook observed, with a touch of impatience in voice and manner.

"And if we do, the hoards of aliens will soon over-run the entire country, win the wealth from her bosom and ship the proceeds to their own lands, as the Chinese were doing till we saw the danger of it and decided that the Chinese must go or they would

eventually wrest from our posterity the land we have struggled so hard to win from the wilds and borne such privations to make worth the coveting. No, no, Mr. Northbrook; we must have a White Australia or the Australians would soon have no country," asserted Mr. Esbourne emphatically.

"That may be. And while you are crying with a loud voice for "A White Australia," "Australia for the Australians," the very people who cry the loudest are not willing to do the work that would open her up for their own benefit; nor are they able to populate the country and supply sufficient Australians to enable them to hold it for themselves against all comers! What with a declining birthrate and many other disadvantages to progress in population, Australia, to my mind is in a poor way to be able to cover more than the fringe of the coastline, for several generations yet to come, let alone to open up her vast inland territory to the hum of the mill, the ring of the anvil, or the roar of the stampers, which would alone betoken the busy hive of industry and consequent prosperity. Here"—sweeping his arm out towards the vast distances which lay around them—"are thousands of acres, yes, miles, of country doomed to lie in the close embrace of a weird silence and solitude that is nigh on desolation, all for the sake of the decision of a few selfish rulers who in the excess of their zeal are doing more harm than good to the country they profess to serve." Roger Northbrook spoke with some warmth of feeling on this subject, as it was one of the policies of the Government then in power, and with which he was not at all in sympathy.

"Well, sir, time alone will prove whether or not they are in the right. I for one think they are," said the squatter quietly. Then they turned their horses' heads back in the direction of the Homestead, and after a sharp canter came to a slight elevation, and side by side they walked their horses up together; then Mr. Northbrook said, with a smile: "What a champion you are for your country, Mr. Esbourne, it's

so refreshing to hear it from you. As a rule it is the very reverse one gets while travelling in other lands. Poor Australia is much abused on the whole, and the fact that she is but a child among nations does not seem to count with her critics. She is expected to have all the wisdom and advancement that experience alone can and has given to other countries. You certainly are a complete change from others I have been meeting lately."

"I am an Australian born and reared," asserted Mr. Esbourne, with an air of real pride. "I have worked my own way up in the world to what I am now by sheer perseverance and determination not to be beaten; I can therefore testify what will-power can do for a man if he will only use it wisely. For this reason I cannot see why every true son of Australia may not be a credit to his own country, as well as an Englishman or a German to theirs. Is it because she is 'Only Australia, the last of the Lands,' that she is to be despised by even those who have drawn sustenance from her generous bosom? Why, she is the fairest land under the sun! and though last she shall yet be first. She is generously blest with full and plenty by the bountiful hand of Providence. We have an abundance of land, as well as an abundance of sunshine, though droughts are sometimes severe; and rain, when it does come, makes up for its tardiness by quantity."

"A little too much of it at times all round. I should think, especially when this Murrumbidgee River is in flood, eh?" laughed Roger Northbrook, mirthfully, as they put their horses to a trot across the paddocks of the ten-mile run.

"Granted," returned the squatter, good-humoredly "but I see even good in that, since the floods leave a deposit that is better than manure for the ground, and the grass grows as fast again after such inundations."

"Admitted again," said Mr. Northbrook, "but after the floods comes the drought, and then follows

bush fires and a scarcity of herbage for the flocks, with perhaps great loss into the bargain. Do you think as lightly of that ? ”

“ Well, no ; that is one of the big troubles we have to tackle. It is a painful sight to see our fine flocks dying by thousands and not be able to do anything to save them. Yes, the drought is one of the worst enemies the pastoralist has to contend with. Yet even that brings its lesson to man, for we must learn to know the seasons and prepare for them accordingly. Then we must also conserve the splendid water supply that flows through the land in our fine rivers, and make the most of the irrigation scheme all over the country ; we shall then be equipped for the worst droughts that are likely to overtake us in the future.”

“ Good ! ” exclaimed Mr. Northbrook, admiringly. “ I see you are a man ready for all emergencies. I no longer wonder at your great success, Mr. Esbourne. If there were but a number more like yourself in this young country it would not require foreign capital or outside enterprise to push her well to the front in a very short time, as you so confidently predict she will yet be.”

“ We pastoralists have to suit ourselves largely to our surroundings, but not allow them to rule us. You have heard it said that man is a creature of circumstances, but I think it would be nearer the mark to say that man is the architect of circumstance. They do say that it is character that builds an existence out of circumstance ; well, as far as I am concerned, I have had ample opportunities of building one out of those which have beset me.”

“ That is very evident,” asserted Roger Northbrook, “ and as you have by experience proved that it is possible, you advise others to go and do likewise ? ”

“ Exactly, and as experience teaches the wise what fools they have been, there is a royal road to wisdom,” said the squatter, lightly flicking his horse with the whip as he leaped a fallen log, and after a

short canter reached the gate leading into the "home farm."

"Well, here we are at home again, and I'm sure you will not be sorry to get indoors out of the heat," and, speaking, Mr. Esbourne leaned over his saddle and opened the gate. A few minutes later the two horsemen drew up by the side verandah of the homestead, where they were greeted by Edna and Ella, who asked simultaneously, "How did you enjoy your morning ride, Mr. Northbrook?"

"How do you think the country is looking, Mr. Northbrook?" cried Ella, laughingly, "that is always the correct question to put to visitors."

"Excellently, to both questions," he answered, smiling. "I have had a most enjoyable morning."

"Except for the heat—I fancy you could have dispensed with some of that?" remarked Ella.

"Well, I did not feel it particularly hot. There is a nice breeze blowing when the horses are moving, and the air is so beautifully clear—such a change from London fogs," said Roger, slyly glancing at the squatter as they dismounted.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Mr. Esbourne merrily, "I am doubtful if he really took particular notice of anything. In fact, to tell you the truth, girls, he has been too busy running down our country to even remember to wipe the perspiration off his brow. There now, I've bowled you out, my friend," he cried jovially, as he turned to speak to one of his men.

"What! Mr. Northbrook, surely you have not been speaking disparagingly of our beautiful land?" said Edna.

"Have you been running down Australia, like all horrid Englishmen? You!" exclaimed the incorrigible Ella.

"No, no! never quite so bad as that, I assure you, ladies," protested Roger, eagerly anxious to defend himself. "I am sure Mr. Esbourne has put my remarks in their worst light. At any rate, they did not seem as bad as that in the saying. I certainly did say that

things were at a very low ebb in the colonies just now ; and that it will take time—yes, time,” he added deliberately—“to allow of the great things being accomplished that your father so confidently predicts.”

“Oh! that’s the best of father: he’s so very optimistic. But I really think we all take after him more or less,” said Ella.

“Then I take it you young ladies share his views about the Village Settlement scheme? I must admit it is very fine in theory, but it might not work out so well in practice. But all the same, though we do not quite agree on some matters, yet it is quite a pleasure to find what large-minded views he holds about Australia generally.”

“Yes, he is as large-minded as he is large-hearted,” returned the elder sister, with a softened light in her eyes as she watched her father’s retreating figure as he crossed the yard. Then she added, looking up quickly at Mr. Northbrook, “But as regards the Village Settlement scheme, which he has evidently been discussing with you, I for one quite agree with father. I think it would be the very best way to deal with the deserving unemployed. Settle the people on the land and stand by them till they get a fair start, just as father would stand by one of his sons if he put him out into the world to learn a trade or profession, till he was able to look after himself. So should a parental Government aid the strugglers in a colony as they require such aid, and when they have once got on their feet—as they must do if they are persevering and earnest—they could then repay in small instalments. This would foster a spirit of independence, without which no man, or body of men, can be individualistic, and that is essential to true success—at least that is the opinion I hold on these subjects, Mr. Northbrook; but I am open to be taught a better way if there be one to help the deserving strugglers,” and she spoke with a glow of enthusiasm on her cheeks and a light in her eyes that proved her sincerity.

Roger Northbrook had watched the face of the woman while he listened attentively to her words, and felt that she did not speak parrot-like and echo the opinions of others upon these subjects, but that she had thought the matter out for herself and felt all she said. He experienced a sensation of real pleasure to find that there was a woman away in the back-blocks of Australia voicing ideas that he generally had felt were only within the province of man's work; but, above all, here was a woman such as he had predicted to his cousin that Woman would become if free to think independently. He found himself becoming deeply interested in Miss Esbourne, and wanted to know more of her.

"I must say it is most unusual to find a squatter and his family holding such views as you express in conjunction with your father. As a rule, I believe, they object to what are known as 'cockies' encroaching upon their district and resumption areas: then how much greater the concession that would allow hoards of indigent villagers being housed in the neighborhood," he observed.

"Ah! it is well seen that you are an Englishman, Mr. Northbrook, and stand up for caste and class," she cried.

"And do you altogether ignore it in Australia?" he asked.

"We certainly recognise it in a limited degree, but it is not so defined as in England. Here it is not *who* you are, but *what* you are, that entitles you to respect," she said earnestly.

"Yes," he added quickly, "the bricklayer who helps to build a House of Parliament, if sufficiently ambitious, may one day sit in its chamber as Premier of the colony, eh, Miss Esbourne?"

"Well, and is not that a credit to our young country, showing that brains are esteemed before gold. We at least will never turn our back upon or shut our ears to the demands of the poor because they are poor. We should remember," she added more reflectively,

"that we are all one in the Universal Family, so that as members of that Great Family we should never be content to sit at ease and see our brethren in need while we have enough and to spare."

"Yet how many thousands do, Miss Esbourne?"

"True; and consequently they are sufferers themselves in a reflex way, since while any portion of the great body of humanity is in pain, want or suffering, the whole cannot be harmonious. We are all Children of the Universal Life, which expresses Itself through Mankind to higher and still higher manifestation."

"Why, Miss Esbourne!" exclaimed Roger, eagerly, "that last remark of yours sounds as though you had got a grip of the New Thought! Am I right?"

"If by the New Thought you mean our recognition of the Oneness of Humanity and God in All, then I have," she admitted.

"How did you hear about it away here? I did not know it had as yet gone far out of America?" he enquired.

"I do not know much about it beyond what I have gathered from a book I had given me. But I have been thinking on these lines for several years, and am learning unconsciously. I believe there are books, though, other than the one I have, and if so I would very much like to get them."

"Then I shall be able to help you. I have brought with me from America a large box of the best works, all from the pens of advanced writers on the New Thought, and I shall be only too delighted to lend them to you. I have only a few with me for present reading while here, but will send to town for the others, and I venture to hope that during my stay we shall have many pleasant conversations together on these subjects of Progressive Thought."

"I hope so, too, Mr. Northbrook, but I cannot tell you how glad I am at the prospect of getting the books. I have wanted to learn more and to find if I am right in the ideas that have been flooding my mind ever since I got the first glimpse of the light of

truth from that book," and Edna spoke with deep feeling expressed in voice and look.

"What is the name of it, may I ask?" enquired Roger.

She told him.

"Ah! one of the very early writers on the Thought, and also one of the simplest, I think; but very good nevertheless," replied Mr. Northbrook.

"He gave me seed thoughts that have brought forth much fruit, and for which I am always grateful and esteem him highly. Truly our work is not always done while we live, for 'he being dead, yet speaketh,'" remarked Edna thoughtfully.

Before Roger Northbrook could reply to her words, Ella, who had been absent during their conversation, now came back to where they still stood on the verandah, and, overhearing the latter part of her sister's sentence, exclaimed:

"Ah! Mr. Northbrook, I am just in time to rescue you, I find. You did not perhaps know our Edna is a *bas bleu*, and once you set her off on her favorite topics—as I perceive you have done—there is no knowing when she will stop. I doubt if she even remembers you've had nothing to eat since morning. Come! the luncheon is ready"—and with this mischievous banter the laughing Ella led Roger away.

CHAPTER IX.

AN EXPANDING SOUL.

"Instructions are daily given by the Higher Self. The silent words of that *Deathless Something* within are words of power. There is something within Man that would always rather do right than wrong. *That* is the Divine Self. Your power is always evolved from *within*—from the soul. It finds an outlet chiefly through the avenues of brain and heart.

—SELECTED.

Some two weeks after Roger Northbrook's arrival at "Cumbooquepa" Station, the books he had mentioned to Edna as having brought with him from

America, and which he had sent specially to Sydney for, arrived. He handed her several selected volumes, and immediately after breakfast one gloriously bright spring morning Edna set off through the orchard to a quiet nook she knew in the bush, with one of the treasured books under her arm, there in solitude to enjoy the rich spiritual food she knew awaited her within its pages.

The spring that year had been late, and though the days were rather warm, yet the early mornings were exceedingly lovely. As Edna walked briskly through the orchard her heart leaped for joy and she felt like joining in the carols of praise to the One Life, in which the birds were merrily engaged. They were busy building their nests, while a continual chatter and medley of calls, interspersed with melodious warblings and wooing notes of love was heard as they sought their little mates. All lent music to the choir of Nature that greeted her ears, while the hoarse laugh of the kookaburra, or "laughing jackass," from his perch far up in the blue-gum trees, joined in as the heavy bass.

The young leaves on the trees were now well formed and the fruits, which would be ready in late December, were showing a symmetry of form that revealed their species and variety, and as they nestled beneath the sheltering leaves they looked like little children hiding in their mother's skirts. Thus thought Edna as she stood beneath a large plum tree, examining the newly-formed plum which was as yet enfolded within the close embrace of the withered blossom, that acted as a protection to the tiny thing till it should become more matured, and it would then be cast off as being of no further service to the new life. While she so gazed, Edna discovered another of God's immutable laws revealed in Nature. Was not this a symbol of the resurrection of the Soul? It but put off a very beautiful body, as represented by the blossom, to evolve from its ashes or decay one still more wonderful and perfectly developed. This process went on season after

season, and though many flowers and numerous beautiful fruits succeeded one another on the same tree, the one life, the original sap of the parent tree, fed them all. Yet they each and every one contained within themselves the power to bring forth from within themselves a tree as perfect as the one parent root which bore them. Thus perfection was possible in every expression of the One Life, and that is what Jesus meant when He said, "Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect."

With wonder and amaze, Edna gazed upon these mysteries of Nature, and began to understand from the lesson they taught her much that had been dark hitherto in the law of her own being. She knew that the tree to bring forth good fruit required cultivation and pruning, and that if neglected it could bring forth but indifferent fruit, or none at all, and thus become an encumberer of the ground.

"Yes, yes," she exclaimed aloud, "I understand now what our trials and sorrows are sent for. They are to enable us to flourish more luxuriantly. They take the place of the digging round, manuring and pruning, which I know the gardener gives these trees. A good gardener never neglects them, even for a season. Then is our Great Infinite Gardener likely to overlook those of us in his Garden of Life whom He knows should bring forth more fruit than we perhaps are doing? That is what is meant by the words, 'Whom the Lord loveth, He chasteneth.' Whomsoever the Great Gardener seeth is a likely tree He pruneth it. Then I shall no longer mourn at my pruning season, since it has brought forth even this much fruit from my soul," she concluded, as she resumed her walk, with head bent in deep meditation.

This late October morning was perfect. Dame Nature seemed to have outrivalled herself, for there was a glorious revelry everywhere in her domains. All things had taken on a festive air and rioted in the glory of being new-born. "Surely," exclaimed Edna, as she crossed the fields towards the glade, "it is Spring's

Jubilee to-day ! A pæon of rejoicing fills the world with a wondrous harmony of note and color."

Forest, glade, woody dell, hill and vale, babbling brook and flower-strewn earth, birds, insects, flowers, and grasses—all, all seemed to be joining in the universal symphony of praise to their glorious and bountiful Creator ! The sun shone out in all his brilliancy from a cloudless blue sky, and his revivifying beams called everything into life and action. The grasses, flowers and leaves revealed a newness that was refreshing. Some of the birds, too, were new, for this year's fledglings piped their first notes and fluttered here and there in their early attempts to use their newly-found wings. Mingled with the medley of birds' voices was the hum of native bees, seeking honey from the freshly opened flowers, while the distinctive aroma of the eucalypti trees scented the morning air.

Edna wandered on through this wealth of color and joyous revelry with light footsteps, seeing beauty everywhere and hearing music in everything. Her book was as yet unopened, but her eyes were wide awake to all around her, striving to read the greater, grander and more wonderful Book of Nature, whose pages lay open before her this glorious spring morning. Her whole being thrilled with joy ; her heart echoed the music of the spheres, and her ears were tuned to catch every note in that perfect harmony. She was being taught by unseen teachers ; her only book so far was Nature, and her school-house the world of active life.

She had been reading in the book through whose pages she first saw the Light an article which embodied some very fine thoughts. It was called " God in the Trees, or the Infinite Mind in Nature." As Edna was an intense lover of Nature, and especially of trees and flowers—indeed, all things wild and natural—she experienced an indescribable exhilaration and freedom, something like that which expressed itself this glorious morning in an outburst of praise and thanksgiving to the All-Good.

"Where Life is, there is Intelligence, and where Intelligence is, there is God." Not just a word of three letters, G-O-D, but this immeasurable Mind that pervades all things; the Infinite Power, the eternal Love, which is everywhere around us and in everything we see, for Love is a substance though unseen, and as God is Love, and also unseen except in His myriad expressions, so LOVE is GOD. So also is Beauty, Life, Wisdom, Peace, and all things that are GOOD. These, too, are God, for God *is* Good, and there is nothing but Good or God."

Thus mused Edna as she walked beneath the arches of green boughs overhead, that partially veiled the sun. Then, with all the enthusiasm of a Nature-worshipper, she cried aloud in a voice of real and heart-felt devotion:

"Oh! Thou wonderful, glorious Creator! How grand, how magnificent Thou art! What a joy to know Thee thus!"

Then, turning towards a giant gum tree, she went close up to it and laid her cheek against its smooth bark, and threw her arm around its graceful trunk with a caressing touch, as she murmured, with a smile upon her lips, at what would seem to any onlooker her folly or even madness—but there was deep true happiness in her voice:

"You grand, strong thing, I love you, for you are a thought, an expression of the All-Good, just as I am. Oh! hasn't our joint Creator a wondrous Mind to be able to reveal so many forms of His wisdom! How plain it seems to me now. I wonder I never saw it all before. Why, we are just each and all manifestations of God, showing Himself to us in many mirrors. He is the One eternal Life Principle, the One within the many, the All in the all."

She stood still for a few moments, resting her cheek against the bark of the tree, while she tried to grasp the full meaning of the last revelation that had come to her. The grandeur of it all made her "be still and know that I AM God."

Presently she continued her walk to her favorite spot near the creek, and, lost in meditation, she did not notice that under a spreading forest giant someone stood watching her with keen interest. Just at that moment a great velvety winged butterfly passed before her and perched itself airily upon a bush near. Again she paused to admire its gorgeous colorings and strange markings, mentally classing it as another beautiful expression of the One Life, while the words of an old song recurred to her mind, and as she turned to pursue her walk she hummed them aloud—

“I'd be a butterfly, living a rover,

Dying when fair things have faded away.”

“But fair things never fade away,” she added. “Never while God the Life of all lives for ever and ever. All things are for ever fair to us if we but think them so.”

Thus she wandered slowly on in all her girlish abandon, with the keen delight in living that had been hers in the days of her childhood and early maidenhood, before the dark hand of sorrow had severed the love chords of her life and left her a sad and silvery-haired woman before her time, with a shadow on her brow and a skeleton in her heart's secret chamber, where once a strong vigorous flame burned upon the altar to a well-beloved idol. But the idol had fallen, the ashes now cold lay upon the altar, and the flame had long since died out, leaving but the trace of its once bright glow, and for many years that chamber was wrapped in a dark and sombre gloom.

To Edna those years of darkness seemed like a journey through a dense valley of shadows, where gibbering phantoms lurked on every side and jeered her with cries of “There is no God! There is no God!” Then heavy clouds of grief and awful doubt obscured the sun of her happiness till it seemed as if there could be no joy or peace for her in the world again—life was over!

Now, what was this new joy, this wondrous peace—peace passing her own understanding—that had come

into her heart lately? There was no apparent reason for it in her outward circumstances, since "the want that hollowed all the heart" was yet there to remind her of what she had loved and lost of earthly things.

She still had the old memory that another held what had once been dearest of all to her, and that very fact made the sweet bitter memory of her dead love a doubly severe pain, one that to a proud nature like hers was hard to fight against. Her outward life was to all appearance a barren waste that stretched before her perhaps for many years to come with no oasis to cheer her on, for she felt that she would never again have the power to love as she had loved; she had already drained the cup of her heart's passions to the lees. There was for her only the hope that she would be able to find all her future happiness in the joys of others.

This had been what she looked for, till that dawn of a new spiritual day, when there broke upon her dry and parched soul showers of blessings—it was a flood that quite swept away her old world, and now, behold! all things to her had indeed become new. She was glad with a great gladness—a gladness that filled her whole being till every sorrow was turned into joy, all tears were wiped away, all dark shadows dispelled, and only Light, glorious Light, filled her soul!

This is not religious mania in the generally accepted sense of the term, yet it is the fervor born of the only true religious worship possible to the human heart. Edna Esbourne had been thus filled with the new wine of the Spirit at a time when she was ostensibly farther away from her preconceived notions of what constituted religious observance and worship of God than she had ever been in her life before. It was therefore a strange new sensation to her, and she was experiencing a divine intoxication, like Noah, who lay drunken in his tent after the flood of understanding which swept over his soul and revealed to him the New Earth or greater realization of his own divine God-being.

Having strayed thus aimlessly and rapturously through orchard, fields and forest belt, and lingered longer on the way than she intended, Edna now reached her coveted nook by the side of a clear pool overhung by creepers and palms, while up in the forks of the tall trees nestled stag-horn, elk-horn and birds nest ferns, in great luxuriance, while the graceful maiden-hair grew thick on the sloping banks and in the gullies around. There was a stillness about this spot that was most noticeable after the noisy revel of Nature's host throughout the first part of her walk. Edna gave a deep sigh of contentment as she seated herself beneath a tree and, leaning back against its sturdy trunk, threw off her hat and pushed her hair from her heated brow, while closing her eyes in silent rapture she sat still for a few moments, then half-breathed aloud :

" Yes, *this is* a chamber of Peace. This is in the ' Silence,' and that means alone with God. Here is Peace—Peace ! "

She had sat thus wrapped in silent thought, imbibing deep draughts of the peace of the place before she should open her book, when suddenly her reverie was broken by a voice saying in full, low tones :

" Peace is only perfect when nothing can disturb it. What shall my penalty be if I prove the culprit ? "

Edna opened her eyes and looked around her. Then on the opposite bank of the pool she saw Roger Northbrook standing with his hat in one hand and with the other holding on to a thick rope of one of the vines that hung suspended from the trees. Smiling, Edna exclaimed :

" Oh ! is it you, Mr. Northbrook ? How did you get there ? "

" Walked from the house after breakfast, as you appear to have done. The beauty of the morning tempted me out," he returned, still standing where she first beheld him, with the shining pool lying between them, in which the trees and sky were clearly reflected. As she looked upon its glassy surface she saw his

athletic form mirrored in its depths, and, pointing to the picture, laughingly said :

"Behold, I see two men, and there is actually but one. Which am I addressing ? "

He glanced at the reflection of himself in the pond, and smilingly replied :

"Both, Miss Esbourne, for they are a duality in unity."

"Very good ; what a full thought ! But are you not coming over ? " she questioned.

"You have not yet invited me," he replied, with a smile.

"Oh ! I did not think it was necessary. Well, then, if you will stand on ceremony, even in the bush—come ! "

Almost before she had finished speaking he had grasped the thick creeper tightly, and with a sudden swing bounded across the pool, and was by her side.

"Very cleverly done," said Edna, laughing gaily, as he threw himself on the mossy turf at her feet. "I begin to think that you are more of a bushman than you will admit. How did you find out this cool retreat of mine ? "

"It does not take a lover of Nature long to discover her hidden charms, Miss Esbourne. Besides, on such a morning who could stay indoors ? " he answered, smiling up into her face with an easy frankness and comradeship that put her quite at her ease.

With an answering smile, Edna settled herself for a chat on the subjects nearest her heart.

She had been longing to discuss several questions with him, but so far had had no opportunity ; the others of the household had monopolized the visitor entirely, which was rather a tax upon his good nature. Roger Northbrook was a man who lived very much within himself, and there were times when the most congenial companionship could not compensate him for an hour spent alone communing with his own higher intelligence, and drawing fresh strength and

wisdom from the hidden reserves within his own being.

For this purpose he had that morning escaped from Mr. Esbourne and the boys, and had started out for a brisk walk alone, bent on finding a quiet spot where he could read and think for an hour or two. He had been fortunate in stumbling across this cool retreat in the heart of the forest belt, and was in solitary possession for some time before he espied the glimmer of a white dress moving among the trees. At first he was not disposed to make his presence known, till he saw that it was Edna, and then he was glad. Ever since their first few words on the verandah the morning he returned from his early ride, he had wished to have a talk with her alone, for there was something about this woman that was quite out of the ordinary and thoroughly awakened his interest. His gaze had often rested upon her beautiful pale face and wondrous dark eyes, which contrasted so strongly with the crown of snow-white hair, that gave such a distinctive air to her whole personality; while he also detected in her general demeanor about the home a something that was totally different to the others of the family, yet not sufficiently pronounced to be unpleasant. There was character and individuality, he knew, but there was also something else that was elusive, and he found himself involuntarily questioning within his own mind—"What was the sad life's story that lay hidden deep in the woman's heart and which must have caused that silvery diadem?"

To Roger Northbrook the face of Edna Esbourne was quite as interesting as to others of less reserve, and though he would never even hint at the desire to know the facts, yet as a writer he had observed her as a most interesting physiological study.

"I am pleased to know that you are a Nature lover, Mr. Northbrook," remarked Edna, "so few men of the world are in this age."

"That is due to the materialism of the day," returned Roger. "We have progressed in all the arts

and sciences, but it is largely at the cost of the sacrifice of what is loveliest and best in the world—God expressed in His creations."

"True; and yet the seal of the Divine is set upon the brow of all mankind, though so many obliterate it and deliberately prefer to wear the brand of Cain. That is, as you know, the development of the Intellect at the cost of Intuition; or, as the Bible story puts it, 'the life of his brother Abel,' " observed Edna, speaking in perfectly natural tones and quiet manner.

The man at her feet looked up into her face before he replied, wondering what manner of woman was this who spoke in language he had not been accustomed to hear from women. Then he decided that the ordinary method of conversation was not what would be either appreciated or expected from him by Edna Esbourne, and he answered, as though finishing her thought more fully :

"Which means the cultivation and consequent appreciation of the artificial instead of the natural." Then added, "But I perceive you are advanced in occult lore when you begin to interpret the Spiritual meaning of the Bible allegories. Where did you get the key?"

"Now you ask me something that I cannot answer you, for it appears to me that I have always had it, but did not know how to use it till after—well, after a great sorrow that fell upon my life and a great darkness came over my soul. This was first dispelled by reading that book I told you about, and then I seemed to waken up and gradually all things came to me. In fact, so fast do the thoughts recur that I fancy I'm only just beginning to remember something I learned ages and ages ago, but which, like the events of our childhood, leave only a hazy recollection in our minds."

"Then you would infer that you consider yourself an old soul?" he ventured, looking into her eyes to watch the effect of his remark, wondering if she would understand it.

" Yes, yes ! " she flashed eagerly. " I am sure I am. I feel at times as though another and greater *me* were thinking through me : one who knew all things and who was only using me—me as I know myself now—as a channel for its ideas, for do you know, Mr. Northbrook, that the strangest ideas and most remarkable thoughts come to me at times. So great are some of them that I feel I am quite incapable of holding them, let alone to express them. I feel—well"—then she paused and looked into his eyes, that were still scanning hers, with a smile on her lips and a half-dubious expression on her face—

" Yes, go on," he said, eagerly. " You feel —— "

" Well, I feel as if the whole Universe were within me—here," and she laid her hand in the centre of her breast as she drew a sharp deep breath, evidently at the vastness of the thought that had escaped her.

" And you feel what is true, for we each and all are a little world within ourselves. It is the macrocosm revealed in the microcosm, the All in One, and the One in all," he said, wondering if she would grasp the fullness of the thought.

Again the woman rose to the height and passed him even, for with a quick inspirational movement she cried :

" Yes, that is what I feel. That all that *is* God *is* in me, all that God *is* is mine. That I am as much a part of His body as this hand is of me. That His life is flowing through me just as it is through you. That I only live in Him and through Him. The moment I think I am apart from Him I am nothing and can do nothing. In like manner if my hand were to say that it is me, all there is of me, it is mistaken, yet it is me and I am incomplete without it, but it must abide in me and with me if it would live. So do we abide in God, the One Life. We are gods, yet we are *not* GOD, any more than my hand is me of itself. Oh ! Mr. Northbrook, is it not a glorious grand thought that we are as essential to God as He is to us ?—that we are part of Himself ? We each may be but a cell in

His great Brain, or a hair of His glorious Head, but we help to form—yes, every living creature does—the great and holy Body of the Grand Man of the Universe : GOD ! ”

Here the woman paused, and the man sat silent. She had been speaking so quickly, so intensely, that she had not noticed the expression of wonderment in his face, and he had no words with which to answer her when silence fell between them.

Presently, in softer, quieter tones, Edna said : “ That is how I understand the All within the All. The One in many and the many in One. But—but it is a vast thought, Mr. Northbrook, and I know I have not expressed it anything like I feel it.”

“ Miss Esbourne, I am astounded, for you have indeed reached heights of thought in the spiritual world to me as yet unknown, and what you have just said shows me that I do not need to hand you many books. You have a Book within your soul on which is evidently written the mysteries of the Universe, and, above all, you have learned to read it with the eye of the Spirit.”

“ Yes, it must be so, for I feel that there are great depths within me yet unfathomed, and over those the Spirit of God moveth, and then my soul brings forth new life, fresh ideas, and all, all are of the Spirit, therefore must be immaculate conceptions. Perfect, because they are born of the soul, fed by the Spirit alone and not by the vain imaginings of the flesh, which profiteth nothing, and is unsatisfying,” she said, with an air of conviction.

“ You read the Bible a great deal, do you not, Miss Esbourne ? ” asked Roger Northbrook, quietly.

“ I have read it a great deal during the whole of my life, at least when I was a young girl I seemed to have eaten the Book, as it were. To me it was a most fascinating literary study. I got thoroughly soaked with its quaint lore and beautiful stories. Then there came a time when for years I never opened it. I turned from it, or if I ever did attempt to read what

had once given me so much delight the passages had no meaning for me. They were words, only words, and my hungry soul sickened for something more sustaining. I could not understand why I had no more pleasure in what once gave me delight."

"How and when did such a change come about, then?" interrupted Roger, eagerly, "for it is easily seen that you do not feel towards it now as you then did. I have only to hear you talk to be convinced that you not only love it, but understand the Book in a most enlightened manner."

"Yes, ah! yes," breathed Edna, tenderly, while a sweet peace stole over her countenance. "'The letter killeth and the Spirit giveth light,' I read it by the light of the Spirit now, and all the dark places are made plain; a wondrous illumination comes to me, and I see my own soul's history written there from Genesis to Revelation."

"How, though, did you get this Light?" asked Roger, eagerly.

"That is just what I am about to tell you," she replied, looking down with a smile at his impatience. "I happened to find an old book in father's bookcase one day, quite a year after I had first found the light, and it was in a very dilapidated state; so its very age attracted me, and on opening it I saw that some extracts in it were written when s's were f's, and, being quaint reading, I took it away to my room to study it at leisure. It was called 'The Perfect Way, or The Finding of Christ,' and was by a woman and a man, who had evidently collaborated. The woman's name was—was, let me think ——"

"Dr. Anna Kingsford and Edward Maitland," interposed Roger.

"Yes, those were the names," cried Edna. "You know the book, then?"

"Yes, I have heard of it, but cannot say I have read it. At the time it came into my hands I was busy with other things," he said.

"Oh! It was full of illumination to me. It opened up the meaning of the New Testament in a wonderful way, and I just devoured every line of it, and from that time—well, I have needed no more books since. That was the key to the mysteries, and I just unlocked the door of my own soul and have wandered through its wonderful chambers at will." Edna paused for a moment and Roger asked quietly:

"Yes, and what have you found there?"

"Many things that I am not permitted to reveal yet, but, best of all, to me at least, I have found Peace—perfect Peace!"

"Then you have found the panacea for all ills, Miss Esbourne. You have found what all the philosophers have searched for and what I, with all my worldly experience and even study of these very subjects you seem so familiar with, and speak so confidently about, have certainly failed to discover," observed Roger.

"You are not at peace?" she queried, looking at him in mild surprise.

"Indeed no, far from it," he responded. "I have had a great unrest upon me lately and have sought to dispel it by travel and change of scene, but I have not been successful so far. But I must admit that since I have been here in your father's home, I have experienced more rest of mind than has been mine for some time."

"I am glad to hear that," said Edna, simply, "and I hope, Mr. Northbrook, that it may be my privilege to help you find the true inward peace, the only peace that will rest your soul."

"I hope so, too, but I doubt if another can be of much service until the person is willing to seek it themselves," he replied.

"And are you not?" she asked.

"Yes,—and no," he admitted, hesitatingly.

"But why? I cannot conceive of anyone knowing how, as you must undoubtedly do, and yet not attaining it."

"There is such a thing as knowledge of the mind that does not reach the heart," he observed.

"Is that your case?" she questioned.

"Yes, I fear it is, for I know I have a good grasp of the basic principles on which this Mental Science, or New Thought, is founded, and am familiar with all the best writers' works about it. But I stop there; I can get no further. Yet I am persuaded that there is something more in these Truths than I have discovered—something that with all my study of Metaphysical Literature has eluded me," he remarked gravely.

"And do you know what it is?" asked Edna, eagerly.

"Ah! if I knew I would not need to regret the lack of it," he rejoined. "But I believe it is that which you have grasped so strongly and express as the 'Inward Peace.' I have only to look in your eyes to know that it is there, though they also reveal the fact that it ——" He hesitated, and she repeated quietly:

"Yes, reveal the fact that —— what?"

"That it was not always peace there," he continued, daringly. "The storms have left their traces that no calm can obliterate."

Edna did not respond, but removed her gaze from his face and let it rest on the book which she held in her lap. Picking it up, she began to turn over the leaves mechanically, even a little nervously. Then Roger Northbrook, fearing he had wounded her finer sensibilities, or touched too roughly on an old wound, said hastily:

"But you have evidently found the Place of Peace which this writer mentions. Allow me, Miss Esbourne?" and he gently took the book from her hands and, opening it at a marked page, began to read aloud these words:

"Act the part of the wise man, and go each day into the silence; there commune with the Infinite, there dwell for a season with the Infinite Spirit of

all life, of all power ; for you can get true power in no other way. Instead of running about here and there to have your cup filled at these little stagnant pools, dried up as they generally are, by the continual rays of a constantly shining egoistic sun, go direct to the fountain head and there drink of the water of life that is poured out freely to everyone if he will but go there for it. One can't, however, send and have it brought by another.

“ Go, then, into the Silence, even if it be but for a short period—a period of not more than a quarter or a half-hour a day, and there come into contact with the Great Source of all life, of all power. Send out your earnest desires for whatsoever you will, and whatsoever you will, if continually watered by expectation, will sooner or later come to you. All knowledge, all truth, all power, all wisdom, all things whatsoever are yours if you will but go in this way for them. It has been tried times without number and has never yet once failed where the motives have been high, where the knowledge of the results beforehand has been sufficiently great. Within a fortnight you can know the truth of this for yourself, if you will but go in the right way.”

Roger paused and, lifting his eyes to Edna's face, saw that her eyes were filled with tears, and in a voice of real concern he exclaimed :

“ Miss Esbourne, forgive me ! Have I caused you pain or awakened sad memories ? I am truly sorry.”

“ No, no ! ” returned Edna, hastily dashing the drops from her cheeks. “ If that were so I had not profited by the instructive lesson the extract teaches : to demand and you shall receive the supply. There was a beautiful lesson for us both in those words, do you not think so, Mr. Northbrook ? ”

“ Yes, I think there was—at any rate for me, for I have indeed been running about here and there, looking for Peace that is only found at home in your

own soul. Waldo Trine evidently knew what he was writing about when he penned those lines," he said.

"Yes, he has discovered the Place of Peace. But how is it you did not observe the passage before?" she asked. "You have read the book, have you not?"

"Yes, but only in an intellectual way. I do not remember that passage impressing me so clearly as it has done to-day. But perhaps I needed to see it evidenced in you, as I have done, to show me what I have missed. I have been running about all over the globe in a vain endeavor to still this restlessness, and now here, in this patch of Australian bush, I have caught the first echo of the secret. Lo! it was not here nor there; it was all the while within, but unrecognised. Now, how shall I find it and make it mine in reality?" he queried.

"Do you really need peace—you, who seem so strong and self-reliant, so self-contained in every way? I should have thought, had you not told me different just now, that you had found it long, long ago. You have poise, which is a much desired gift?" concluded Edna, with calm questioning in her eyes.

"That is just the trouble," he responded. "I am afraid I have understood them but not put them into practice. I have been, as you observed a while ago, 'slaying my Abel and so Cain is an outcast still.' My intellect has certainly fully grasped the scientific basis of the Truth, but I have not gone into the spiritual depths as I perceive you have done. I thought, when I first came here and found that you knew something about the Science, that it would be my privilege to teach you a great deal on those lines that are agitating the minds of the latter-day thinkers. I, however, have learned to-day, Miss Esbourne, that you have more than I can impart. That is, the method of appropriating the Science for your own Soul's development, not as a mental exercise only, but as a living principle in your own life. This alone makes it of any value to the individual or the race, and ensures it being a healing-power for all the ills that flesh is

heir to. I wish I had your talisman. Will you give it to me?" he asked, looking earnestly into her great dark eyes, which beamed upon him in true womanly sympathy, and told him that the soul within was at rest, for the depths of her being were God's.

"You have it!" she exclaimed. "It is yours just as much as it is mine. The way is the same, the Source is the same; and you can draw from it in like manner as I am learning to do. It is found in the Silence—the place of true Prayer and Holy Thoughts." Then speaking more gently, she added, "Oh! Mr. Northbrook, I can not tell you how great is my happiness and joy to feel that I am gifted by the hand of the All-Good, with sufficient of the healing element of life and power to enable me to have done for ever with brooding memories of the past. I am so filled with this wonderful happiness that I feel I want everyone else to know it, to taste of it, 'to taste and know that the Lord is Good,' and once having tasted they can never be hungry or thirsty or restless any more. They have the Pearl of Great Price, and it is theirs eternally, for it is indeed Life Eternal to know God as I have lately learned to know Him—to see Him in everything around us, recognise Him in everyone we meet, even though they may be degraded, poor, ignorant and sinful; still, it is the One Father who is in all and through all. What a consoling thought to be able to understand *how* God is everywhere, that He is indeed Omnipresent, Omnipotent and Omniscient. That is why I can see Him in you as in myself; in the prince as in the peasant; in yonder bird as in this great strong tree; in the air we breathe as Life; in the power that rules the Universe as Might; in the hearts of our dear ones as Love. Yes, above all, to see Him as Love is the grandest thought of God. Nothing else in the world could so perfectly and fully represent LOVE—pure, true, and undefiled. That is as I understand God best. That is why I feel certain I know the only true God, now, after many years of gloom and darkness to my seeking soul; and knowing

that only true God who is LOVE, I must, I must love Him with all my heart, with all my soul, and with all my strength ; and in loving Him I love my Higher Self, which is the Christ, or Son of God lost in Humanity ; so that impels us to love our neighbor also, for he too is ourself."

Edna had spoken with so much earnest enthusiasm and strong feeling that she almost forgot Roger Northbrook's personal presence : she only felt the spiritual affinity that existed between them as growing or awakening souls seeking their goal of existence. This put them on a mental level and broke down all barriers of reserve that might have existed between them because of such a short acquaintance or because he was a man and she was a woman. To Edna, then, they were just souls and children of One Father.

Roger on his part had been watching the expression of her face closely, though her eyes were not fixed upon him, but were gazing away through the vista of gum-trees before them, and he saw there a strong character gradually developing itself and a steady light in her eyes revealed the strength that was being evolved through that delicately moulded form ; a light that beamed from her soul's citadel that nothing earthly would again quench. Nor would she be daunted by circumstances or even opposition, for there was revealed sufficient self-confidence and latent power to prove that all things are possible to him who so believeth.

This woman was destined for great things, and was daily being prepared for the work that lay before her in the future, and although she was as yet unconscious of her own uncommon destiny, he saw the travail of a great soul going on within her. He also felt certain that she would be fully equal to the demands made upon her, be they ever so difficult, for she had sufficient courage to rise superior to all discouragements and disasters, to over-ride every obstacle that might cross her path or block her progress to her goal. He also felt that it would be his privilege to watch the gradual

development of this most uncommon character, and see the final unfoldment of her eager aspiring soul, and he was glad that it was so.

When at last he did make reply to her speech, after which a short silence had fallen between them, he said very softly :

“ May I ask you a question, Miss Esbourne ? ”

“ Why, of course, Mr. Northbrook,” she answered, smiling down at his upraised countenance, that was then rather grave.

“ If you do not care to answer it, I shall not mind in the least ; only I think it would help me immeasurably to find the peace that is yours if I but knew how yours was won. Do I ask too much ? ”

She looked calmly at him, with a gentle smile upon her lips, and said in her silvery tones, full of womanly tenderness and a great impersonal love in her heart :

“ No, you do not ask more than I am willing to give, yet the story of my life is a sad one, and the telling of it in detail would only harrow me and not help you in the way you desire. But I can and will tell you the history of my soul. How for several years I lost God—in fact, I know now I had never truly found Him, but I lost the only apology for God I then had : the personal conception of a Magnified Man somewhere up above the stars. Yes, I will tell you how I lost that idol to find the One and Only true God in my own Soul—the God I now and forever worship.”

Then quietly and calmly Edna told him the story of her soul's development from childhood upwards, till the night of the great revelation, but without even touching upon the chief tragedy of her life, merely saying a great sorrow had befallen her and thus driven her into doubt and gloom ; but she told him of the suicide of Sydney Mostyn and the eagerness with which she tried to live the spiritual life, and gradually unfolded before him, little by little, the birth of a living conscious Soul.

Roger Northbrook listened in silence till the end, and when she had finished he said in hushed and earnest tones, while he reached out his hand and clasped hers almost appealingly :

" Miss Esbourne, will you help me to find and know *your* God, that He also may be *my* God, and I may enter into your Place of Peace ? "

" I will ! "

Their eyes and hands met and that look and clasp sealed the mutual confidence of a soul friendship that was from that hour established between them and which was afterwards to have so great an influence upon his future life and upon hers.

CHAPTER X.

NEW ARRIVALS.

" That which we are we shall teach not voluntarily, but involuntarily. Thoughts come into our minds by avenues which we never left open, and thoughts go out of our minds through avenues which we never voluntarily opened. Character teaches us over our head."

—EMERSON.

During Christmas and New Year time the family at " Cumbooquepa " Homestead generally kept open house for their friends ; therefore, fresh arrivals at the Station were frequent, and the house party had greatly increased in numbers by the first week in December.

Among those to come early were Gwendoline and Amy Godfrey, girl friends of Ella's, especially, and old friends of the family. It was at their home at Pott's Point that the girls generally spent their holidays when in Sydney. Gwendoline was Leonard Esbourne's promised wife ; a tall graceful and most lady-like looking girl of about 23 years of age ; fair and delicate, with a soft expression in her light blue eyes ; gentle of manner and mild of speech. She was quite a contrast to her sister Amy, who was three years younger, but short, plump, dark and vivacious ;

bubbling over with life and spirits and as full of tricks and pranks as a monkey. Indeed, in the estimation of her sister Gwendoline, Amy was nothing but a "Tom-boy." Nevertheless, she was a charming, good-hearted and sweet-tempered girl, with laughing brown eyes and rosy dimpled cheeks that tempted you to catch and kiss those tantalising sunbeams as they came and went with such bewitching charm. Amy was Ella Esbourne's particular friend and school-chum, and when they were together the spirit of mischief ran riot.

About a week after the Godfrey girls arrived, came a young Anglican clergyman, who had been a fellow student with Frank at Oxford, and, having secured a curacy in Sydney, had but recently arrived in Australia to take up his duties at Darlinghurst, early in the New Year. When Frank Esbourne was leaving London with his father, he had invited his friend to visit them at "Cumbooquepa" when he came out to the colonies, which he purposed doing as soon as he could get an appointment. A very warm liking had sprung up between the two rather dissimilar youths, which had ripened into a sincere friendship before their college days were over. On his arrival he wired to Frank, who went down to Sydney and brought him back with him to the Station, where he was warmly welcomed by them all, and soon felt like an old friend in the hospitable squatter's home.

The Reverend Cyril Clifford was a young man of about two and twenty; tall, and of slender build, but with a slight stoop of the shoulders which indicated the delicacy of constitution, which had been the principal reason for his choosing an appointment in the colonies, as his parents considered the warmer climate would better suit his weak lungs. He was pale and fair as a woman, with clean shaven face, clear complexion, dark hair and grey eyes.

He was the youngest child of an old family, who had a good standing in England, but no money. Most of the sons had already been well placed in the

various professions, and several of the daughters had married well. Cyril was the last to be settled, and, for him, when his father came to look round there was only the church left. The boy had no great predilection for anything else as a calling, except it might be that of an artist; but his father wished him to go into the Church and he had no good reason for objecting. He certainly had never felt that he was particularly called to accept Holy Orders, and was not really conscious that there was any especial qualification requisite, besides a college education, to fit him for the work. To pass his examination was all that troubled him; doctrines, creeds and traditions he accepted as the property of the church, and as they had been accepted by them for generations, and had also been good enough for his father, they were good enough for him and were certainly not for any man to question.

The mysteries of the Incarnation, Miracles, Resurrection and Revelations were all sealed books to the Rev. Cyril Clifford as far as his own analysis of their meaning was concerned. He, in common with so many others who have done the same before him, just accepted them as they were handed down to him, never questioning in his mind what they meant to him as an individual, let alone what they represented to his soul. Even if he had thought anything about it, and his reason had absolutely refused to believe them in their literal sense, *he* most assuredly was wrong, said the Church—*never* their traditions or doctrines! But at that time of election, or rather selection, Cyril Clifford was not able to think out the subject for himself, he was wholly guided and influenced by others who controlled his actions as well as his thinking. He had yet to learn that the question to-day is not, "What Church do you belong to?" but "What is your level in the Thought World?" And this is because Mind, not Creed, is the measure of a man.

The true teacher or minister unto the people is the one who offers them the fruits garnered in that world of thought in which he lives and thinks for

himself instead of handing down "the traditions of the elders." We are no more compelled to live in old fashioned thought chambers than we are to use a stage coach to-day for travelling when we can employ a motor car or an aeroplane.

But this would have savored of rank heresy on the part of the son of such a staunch old churchman as was the Hon. Geoffrey Clifford, of Shoreham Manor, Kent, and for a son of his ever to presume to question the authority of the Church to rule his thinking in the matter of spiritual things, or to refuse to conform to her laws, such, to the good old man would have seemed as terrible as treason and, in his estimation, just as punishable. But to do the young man full justice, he never for one moment contemplated such a thing; the real fault was that neither did he question the stability of his beliefs before he bound himself to accept them and promised by vow to voice their teachings. He had just drifted into Holy Orders with an easy languid grace, such as he might have evinced had he been appointed *aide-de-camp* to a colonial governor. This was probably attributable to the lack of necessity for any strenuous exertion, fostered by his delicate constitution from a child, and accentuated by his naturally artistic temperament. Certain it is that the young man never gave the subject one really serious thought, beyond the efforts he put forth to pass his examinations and take his B.A. degree, and so do his father's opinion of himself credit and win the appointment in Australia which his friendship with his colonial college friend made him desire more than he had ever desired anything before.

The advent of these fresh visitors to the homestead took up a great deal of Edna's time, and she had very few opportunities of being alone for hours at a stretch, as had been her habit. There were all sorts of amusements and excursions being arranged, that necessitated her participation to a great extent; she therefore had few opportunities of indulging in the quiet talks on her favorite subject with Mr. Northbrook. He also felt

the difference which the newcomers made in the house, and, being young people with interests and tastes quite different to those of the sedate thinker and man of the world, he took very little part in their amusements, but spent most of his time with the squatter, or, with his book and pipe, sought some shady spot where he could spend an hour or two in thought. He wished he could see more of Edna, as the early talks they had had when he first came to the Homestead had left a very deep impression upon him. He had made up his mind to return to town the following week so as to keep his promise to his cousin to spend Christmas with them, but he hoped that he should have the opportunity of several quiet talks with Edna Esbourne before the time came for him to take his leave. This opportunity came sooner than he was aware it would, for that morning Edna had ridden over to "Warri-moo" to make arrangements with the Mostyn girls to take part in a picnic which the Esbournes were giving on the following Wednesday near Forest Glade, and to which they all looked forward, as it was one of the beauty spots of the district. Roger, finding the time hang heavily upon his hands, also wandered off by himself after luncheon, leaving the young people to finish a tennis tournament in which they were engaged when he left the Homestead and strolled away into the bush.

"I really think it is far too hot to play this afternoon, Ella," observed Mrs. Esbourne, as the four enthusiasts, with their racquets, passed, bound for the tennis court, on their way through the lounge, where their mother was seated. "You ought to postpone the finish of the tournament till the weather gets cooler."

"Oh! Mother, it isn't nearly so bad as we've had it sometimes, you know," protested Ella. "Besides, we don't feel the heat much, do we, Amy?" appealing to her sworn ally for assistance to uphold her plea. But the little traitor only shrugged her shoulders, with

a queer grimace that exasperated Ella, and in desperation she added, "Well at any rate not when we are busy playing, it's not till afterwards that we know it has been just a little warm—eh! Amy?" This with a sly glance at her friend, whom she well knew would end up in a bath of perspiration.

"That may suit you Ella, and even Amy," replied Mrs. Esbourne, "but you must remember that Mr. Clifford is not accustomed to our tropical climate, nor constitutionally able to stand the heat and added fatigue of playing, as you two strong healthy girls are. You should study the comfort of your guests, my child, and not your own pleasure."

"But, mother dear, Mr. Clifford is just as eager to play as we are; and he's such a good player, too. You know this is the final and we ought to play it off to-day. Then I promise you we'll give the court and the balls a rest till the weather cools a bit."

"If it ever does!" interjected Amy.

"Hush! You raven!" said Ella, in a stage whisper, at which Gracie, who was listening from her couch, laughed aloud. "Can't you support the motion instead of trying to kill it with your lugubrious interjections?"

"Why should she?" interrupted Len, who, coming in at the moment, heard the last remark. "You ought to know that Amy wants to prolong the agony, so the state of the weather helps her to grind her own special axe. I bet she sees 'Failure' written large on the horizon of the tennis court and knows already that she and Frank are doomed."

"Indeed, Len. Esbourne, you never made a greater mistake in all your life," retorted Amy, with a characteristic toss of her head, as she turned toward the door on her way to the tennis court. "Let me tell you that I don't know the meaning of the word 'Failure,' for it's not included in my dictionary, if it is in yours, sir!" Len. laughed gaily at her bantering retort.

"Bravo! bravo! that's the way to talk, Amy, and that's the spirit that wins," exclaimed Frank, appearing on the scene, followed by Cyril Clifford, both attired in their flannels, ready for the last tussle. "Come on, girls, or we'll lose the best part of the afternoon; it's gone three now," he urged.

"Then you are really bent on playing, I see?" remarked Mrs. Esbourne.

"Yes, I should think so, mother. What makes you ask?" queried Frank, in surprise.

"Oh! mother thinks it is too hot to play to-day," volunteered Ella.

"Why, mother, I seldom hear you grumble about the heat, and as for us, well I think we'll risk it. What do you say, Cyril?"

"I am quite ready and willing if you all are," replied the young clergyman. "Have you any objections, Mrs. Esbourne?"

"No, none whatever for the others. I was thinking of you, Mr. Clifford. You are not yet accustomed to the intense heat which we get at this time of the year, and may find it too much for your strength," observed Mrs. Esbourne, as with her motherly eyes she glanced at the pale face of the delicate young man.

"Oh! I think I'll manage all right this time, Mrs. Esbourne. If the others can play I'll have a hard try, too," he added, with a smile.

"Well done! Mr. Clifford," cried Ella, "come along then and when they next greet us it will be as victors and they'll have to crown us with laurel wreaths," and she laughingly hurried him off.

"More likely to be cypress, since you'll be mourning for your lost laurels," retorted Amy, as the four disappeared through the glass doors at the end of the lounge room, Ella turning back and calling out, "You'll keep us some tea, please, mother?" to which Mrs. Esbourne nodded a smiling assent, and the pretty laughing girl ran off to join the others on the fine tennis lawn at the eastern side of the garden.

The apartment in which Mrs. Esbourne was seated sewing, near her invalid daughter's couch, on this hot November afternoon is well worthy of mention. It was a long oblong room situated in the centre of the building, formed after the similitude of a court-yard, and enclosed on all sides by the living rooms of the house and with a dome-like roof, in which were stained-glass windows that could be opened by cords and pulleys or closed according to the state of the weather. From the centre of this dome a massive cut-glass chandelier of five lamps hung suspended, which, when lit, had a very brilliant effect. In the daytime the sunlight shed through the multi-colored panes overhead cast rainbow hues upon the floor and flickered upon the walls and furniture in kaleidoscopic mazes of color.

The arrangement and furnishings of this apartment were quite in accordance with its architecture, and were for use as well as ornament. Rattan lounges, deep-seated easy chairs, occasional tables, writing desks and easels, with a work-basket here and there, were scattered about in tempting array to entice the worker or idler to humor his or her own particular mood as the impulse swayed them. In the centre of the upper part of the room was a fine revolving bookcase of several tiers, well filled with volumes for everyday use, while a cottage piano and small organ completed the main features of the furnishings.

But it was the hundred and one little nick-nacks, and the myriad scattered trifles, that gave such an artistic and yet really comfortable air to the apartment: while the polished floor, with its handsome oriental mats dotted here and there in patches of vivid color on the dark background, all tended to make this really charming room a veritable bower of comfort and beauty combined.

"The Lounge," as it was commonly called, being of very fine dimensions, made a splendid ballroom when necessity demanded, and this was frequently the case when the house was filled with visitors. At the lower end of the apartment a pair of large swing glass

doors gave exit into a small but exceedingly pretty conservatory, stocked with most of the English hot-house plants and others that would not thrive out-of-doors on account of the heat. In these Mrs. Esbourne took particular pride and tended them carefully, while Ella, who had been given a course at one of the horticultural colleges, was an expert as well as an enthusiast, and proved most successful with gardening in all its branches.

It may here be mentioned that Mrs. Esbourne had the main say in designing the homestead, and it was her mind that conceived the idea of the Lounge. Her architectural design, however, did not stop at beauty alone: it also embraced convenience and comfort, as well as affording all advantages in keeping with the climate.

She had arranged it so that the principal sleeping apartments opened off the Lounge, and the doors of each were hung with light tapestry curtains on rings, that would conceal them when necessary during the day, and in very hot weather would permit of each occupant leaving his door open at night and so ensure a cool breeze passing through the apartment, from the open windows in the centre dome, or the fanlights of the entrance doors, of which there were several to the lounge. At the upper end of the Lounge Room, a glass door opened into the main entrance hall, on one side of which was the large front drawing-room, and on the other were the library and smoking-room, with Mr. Esbourne's private office or "den," as he called it. Each room in the house had French doors opening upon the wide verandahs which surrounded the homestead on every side. This arrangement gave every room in the house a separate entrance, both into or out of the house, per medium of the Lounge inside or the verandah outside, and so ensured any sleepless one being able to rise and pass out upon the verandah or into the garden on hot nights without disturbing the others.

In a cosy corner of this handsome and commodious Lounge Room stood Gracie's wheel couch, a most

luxurious one and specially made and fitted to suit the little helpless occupant and meet all her needs and tastes. Her father had had it fitted with a revolving table, with movable reading and writing attachments complete.

Here the little invalid spent most of her days at her favorite occupations, and, the room being the principal rendezvous of the family, she could take part in all that went on, and so keep in touch with what was of passing interest to the home life of each. Here it was that Edna used to bring her work or book, and spend odd half hours by her young sister's side, chiefly discussing the new ideas that had recently taken strong hold upon her mind and drenched her soul with new life and love.

That same morning, when most of the household had sought the cool hammocks or lounges on the western side of the verandah, Edna had brought her book to Gracie's side, intent on interesting the invalid, who appeared to be feeling the heat rather severely.

Gracie always welcomed Edna's coming and nothing pleased her better than for them to be alone together so that Edna might talk to her and tell her all about her newest ideas, for Grace thought they were all just lovely, and entered into them with a quick intelligence and keen zest that delighted Edna.

After she had been reading for some time, Edna paused and said,

"What a great pleasure it has afforded us to have those books brought us. It almost seemed as if Mr. Northbrook was sent here in answer to my desire for more light on these subjects."

"Yes, doesn't it, Edna?" admitted Grace. "You talk to him about them often, and he understands it, too, does he not, dear?" she asked.

"Yes, he is most advanced in the Science, and we have had several enjoyable conversations on these subjects. But since our friends have arrived I have had little opportunity of seeing him much alone. I shall quite miss Mr. Northbrook when he leaves us,"

said Edna, regretfully. "I have grown mentally and spiritually since he lent me these books, and have got a broader grasp of things till I think I know what it means to be 'In Tune with the Infinite,' as this writer puts it."

"You have been that, Edna, ever since that night you found God," said Gracie gently.

"Yes, dear, but lately it seems as if my whole being leaps with joy each time I grasp a new truth for myself, and, as some writer says, 'Truth is the revelation of Nature's verities,' I have been able to seek Truth first within my own soul, and then to prove it by comparing it with Nature. If it stands this test, I know that I have gained another Truth for myself, and, like Liebnitz in the Search for Truth, I would rather seek for and find one Truth for myself than have a hundred handed to me ready discovered."

"I think you have grown so much—I mean soul-growth—since you first grasped that idea of God we talked about, when I read you the poem," remarked Grace. "But, Edna, when I listen to you I think you know more than I read in the books. You know it the same as they put it, but you know it differently, and in a larger way somehow?" ventured Gracie. "At least I notice it, and also find myself thinking a lot of fresh thoughts that come up in my own mind that I never read in the books. But it is as though they just called them and the thoughts answered."

"Yes, dear, I know," replied Edna quickly, smiling at her little sister's efforts to explain what was working within her own soul. "That is what appears to me the greatest glory of the New Thought, for every man has to seek and find, before he can understand and apply it for himself. There is no vicarious Atonement or work ready done for man years before he was even born into the world. That sacrifice of Jesus on Calvary was an example only for us to put off the old man and put on the new man of the spirit. Each and every one of us must seek and find these Pearls of truth for

ourselves, and in seeking we work out our own ignorance and thus redeem ourselves by knowledge gained through experience, which is the only road to Wisdom. As we create ourselves by thought, so we redeem ourselves by each action done in accordance with true or right thinking."

"Then, Edna, do you think that is what is meant by 'working out our own salvation with fear and trembling'?" inquired Gracie.

"Most assuredly, my pet, for is not every act of our lives a creating and building, or a breaking up and pulling down? We work out the error thought by deliberately choosing to work into our consciousness, and hence into our bodies, new and good thought, and this is a creative process. Not one of us is the same man or woman we were even a year ago. The class of thought we think alters our whole mentality and this reflects upon the body for good or ill, so that we clothe ourselves—or our souls—with our ideas, just as we clothe our bodies with our dress. The style of dress one wears shows whether the person is artistic or not, so the body, in like manner, expresses the class of thought the mind is accustomed to indulge in most. This eventually shows its character in the face and form and so become the garments of the soul."

"Then that is what is meant by the words, 'Wash your robes white.' The robes mean your body, the fleshly robes of the soul, and the way we are to make them white is by thinking pure, clean, true thoughts, and that is the washing process, I suppose? Is it not, Edna?" questioned Gracie, her eyes beaming with the flash of new light that had illuminated her mind.

"Exactly, darling," replied her sister, "how quick you were to grasp it. It makes it so much easier to talk to you. But you did not finish the verse, dear—'White in the blood of the Lamb.' This means that you wash them in the blood of Jesus Christ, and He is representative of the full-grown manhood of the race in a spiritual sense. Then as Jesus is the perfect human, Christ being next is the divine, who is always

the lamb, or the Son of God, and Chrestos—or Christ—means the best. So that when you have come to understand the best or highest, you have shed the blood of Jesus to put on the New Man, or the Life of Christ, which life, or blood, cleanses us from all sin. That means, dear, that when we have come to a degree of understanding of our own divinity—our true God-being—we cannot sin, we cannot think error-thoughts at all ; we have passed all examinations, and are wise with the wisdom of the Spirit. This is what is meant by the statement, “ The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.” Then we simply cannot sin ; it is against our divine nature.”

Edna paused and for a moment there was silence between the two young students of truth. The younger one lay with her eyes fixed intently on her sister's face, trying to realise the full meaning of the words just uttered. Then with a quick flash of intelligence she exclaimed joyously :

“ Oh ! Edna, Edna ! I understand ! How wonderful, how beautiful, and yet how simple it is ! But Edna, there is another feeling that I have when I think of the whole idea, and it is an uplifting sensation within me, just as if I was carried out of my old self : I no longer feel a poor, weak, miserable creature, too sinful and helpless to do anything for myself ; and to be saved at all just had to be died for by somebody else, ages before I was ever born ; before anybody knew I should be born or was going to sin. Indeed, it appeared to me a matter of indifference whether I sinned or not, the whole thing was done for me and I could please myself. I had no responsibility, no say in the matter ; was too insignificant even to be considered, yet was important enough to be died for. I was just one among a great multitude of sinners, not one better or worse than the other since the same death had to atone for the lot. So whether I turned out an awful sinner I was just as good as those who hardly sinned at all. It never did seem quiet fair, did it, Edna ? ”

"No, dear, not if you put it like that, but ——"

"Oh! but now, Edna," interrupted Gracie, excitedly, "now that you have showed me the newer, grander meaning of that verse I feel, well, I feel as if I were a responsible person, a somebody in God's sight; an individual. Oh! no, more than that—a very goddess! I think that is what is meant by the words, 'A Child of God,' for that is just exactly how I feel, Edna—yes, a very God-child!" concluded Grace, emphatically nodding her head.

As Grace lay back among her cushions Edna bent over and kissed the soft cheek of the girl, saying gently:

"And that is just what you are, dear. You have grasped a great and glorious truth, and by so doing have taken the first steps to immortality when you realize here and now that you are not a worm of the dust, but a Child of God—that the Omnipotent alone is your eternal Father!"

This conversation was overheard by the Rev Cyril Clifford, who, unknown to Edna, was resting in his own room with the door open and only the curtain drawn; and the effect of the statements upon his mind were such as to cause him some mental unrest and real distress, so much so, indeed, that he determined to broach the subject to Miss Esbourne on the first convenient opportunity. As a clergyman, he felt it his duty to ascertain what manner of teaching this was that they had imbibed, which if allowed to spread would pull down the bulwarks of the church by striking a death-blow at its chief dogma. So with the thought fixed in his mind he watched and waited his opportunity to attack Miss Esbourne and thrash out the subject with her thoroughly. He was a fair debater when at college, and he had no fear of coming off worst in a subject that he felt was peculiarly his own—especially when his opponent was only a woman.

While the tennis match was in progress that hot afternoon, Dr. Fairbourne, of Wagga, who had been the family physician ever since Gracie was born, and

had attended her all through her illness, happened to be passing the Station boundary and came in for a cup of tea and a chat with Mrs. Esbourne, and of course a look at his favorite little patient.

"Why, I believe you will be getting up and running away from us one of these fine days, in spite of all our gloomy prognostications, if you keep on improving so," said Dr. Fairbourne, as he stroked her sunny curls in a fatherly way.

"I am believing that I shall myself, Doctor," answered Grace, with a smile. "Edna says I shall get well and be able to walk and be as active as she is some day."

"Well, well, let us hope so," admitted the physician, in a consoling yet rather dubious tone, that did not escape Gracie's quick ears, for she answered hastily:

"Well, at any rate, I'm going to think I can, and Edna says that by thinking we can build new bodies or robes for our souls; so I am going to have a very fine one by-and-bye," and Gracie laughed softly with the others, who considered it one of "Gracie's quaint notions." Turning to Mrs. Esbourne, Dr. Fairbourne enquired:

"How is your eldest daughter? Is she keeping well now?"

"Splendid, thank you, Dr. Fairbourne. She seems to have taken a new lease of life lately. It is quite remarkable the change there is in her," replied Mrs. Esbourne.

"Yes, I have noticed a vast improvement myself," announced the doctor. "I met her on my way here; she was riding to 'Warrimoo,' and I stopped to speak with her for a few minutes. She has wonderfully improved, and seems to have got over her trouble better than we anticipated, eh?" remarked the doctor, in his familiar and privileged way, being, as he was, an old friend of the family and aware of the blight that had fallen upon Edna's early years.

"She has indeed," admitted Mrs. Esbourne, "but she will never really be the same girl again; she will always carry the cruel mark of that bitter experience."

"Yes, yes, that was a terrible time for her—for you all, indeed; and she bore it wonderfully well, too. I never expected her to pull through that attack of brain fever, but she was a brave fighter; and then to be so patient and forbearing over the scoundrel who caused her all the trouble! I suppose you have never heard anything about him since?" said Dr. Fairbourne, interrogatively.

"No, never a word, I am happy to say—that is directly. We did hear quite indirectly that he had married some young girl with plenty of money, and then cleared out and left her after spending it all. That would be possible and quite in keeping with his character. But as to the truth of it I cannot say and have no means of ascertaining, and, had I, would certainly not trouble to make enquiries."

"Does Miss Edna know of this rumor?" asked the doctor.

"No, not a word. We would never even mention his name in her presence. Whether she has quite forgiven or forgotten him I cannot tell, only her own heart knows. But to an ardent temperament like hers, you know it was a great blow and has quite spoiled her young life," said the mother sadly.

"No! no! madam, don't say that. It is not so. I think your Edna is a grander, nobler woman than ever, because of that experience. She has a long vigorous life before her yet, and, if I am not mistaken, she will make good use of it," asserted the old doctor, confidently.

"Well indeed I hope so, and I begin to think so lately, for I notice she appears to look at life from a very different standpoint. She always was religiously inclined, if you remember, doctor, from a child."

"Yes, yes, yes," assented Dr. Fairbourne, with a nod of his grey head and an indulgent smile.

"Well, she has adopted the same principle again, but this time on different lines. She has taken up another class of thought, which seems to console her wonderfully."

"I noticed she had some queer ideas about religious matters during my last conversation with her. But they are quite heterodox, are they not?" he interrupted.

"Yes, I suppose you would call them such. Edna terms it New Thought, and it appears our visitor, Mr. Northbrook, whom you have met, I think?"——

"Yes, yes, the author! A very fine fellow; most advanced in his views on the political question," said the physician.

"Well," continued Mrs. Esbourne, "it appears that he is also tainted with the same class of thought and they talk together over it for hours. His coming has quite brightened Edna."

"Does Mr. Northbrook know of your daughter's position?" asked Dr. Fairbourne, in a half whisper.

"No; oh, no!" responded Mrs. Esbourne, hastily. "We would not have the matter discussed on any account for Edna's sake, it is such a sore point with her, as you know. And doctor, I know you can be trusted under all circumstances to keep it a secret for her sake," and Mrs. Esbourne laid her hand upon the doctor's arm with the familiarity born of an old friendship.

"Have no fear, my dear madam. Have not the least anxiety over the subject. We doctors are like priests: we guard our secrets as sacred, and as deeply hidden in our own bosoms as though they were our own. Besides, apart from your wishes, my personal feelings towards your noble daughter are such as I entertain for very few women. It is such women as Miss Esbourne we need to save and uplift our men by a miracle of love. God give them such women as mothers, sisters, daughters and wives!" and the doctor held his hostess's hand in a close grasp of friendly feeling as he spoke, while wishing her good-bye.

Just at that moment Ella rushed in from the tennis lawn in a most excited state, crying :

"Oh! mother, Mr. Clifford has fainted. He fell on the lawn just now. Come quickly, do!"

"No, no! wait; tell them to bring him in at once out of the heat," said the doctor peremptorily. "Come, Mrs. Esbourne we will get ready for him and I'll soon bring him round."

"Len. and Frank are carrying him between them. Oh! dear, he looks as if he were dead," moaned Ella.

"My dear, I advised you not to play to-day" began her mother. But the impulsive conscience-stricken girl only covered her ears and ran out of the room, not wishing to hear "I told you so!" voiced even by her gentle and considerate mother

In a few minutes the young clergyman was under the doctor's skilled care, and it was not long before he was restored to consciousness but looking very wan and washed-out after his unusual exertions in the exceptional heat. When he was made quite comfortable and able to talk a little, Dr. Fairbourne gave strict orders that on no account was the young man to venture outdoors in the heat of the day, nor to take part in any amusements that would necessitate the least exertion. He was in far too delicate a state of health to allow of him taking liberties with himself as he had been doing that afternoon. He must consider himself a partial invalid for a little while.

After partaking of a cup of tea with them all, the doctor took his leave with a parting injunction, while Mrs. Esbourne, who was so grateful that he happened to be there at the time assured him that she herself would see that his orders were obeyed, and watch over the delicate young clergyman as if he were her own son.

CHAPTER XI.

TURNED-DOWN PAGES OPENED.

Roger Northbrook walked some considerable distance from the Homestead that afternoon of the tennis

tournament, which ended in the collapse of the Rev. Cyril Clifford. He was bent on getting deep into the heart of the bush, away from interruption, where he could indulge in an hour's self-communing. He still felt that restlessness upon him in spite of his assertion to Edna Esbourne that he greatly desired to find Peace. But he knew that he carried his inharmony within his own breast and no one but himself could restore peace to his troubled heart, none but himself could ensure his happiness and soul-joy.

There was a page in Roger Northbrook's Life-Book which he had turned down when he left Australia three years before. He had turned it down deliberately—or thought he had—though he felt then that it contained all the happiness that life could ever hold for him. He had gone away intending to forget, but found that it was much easier to intend to do a thing than actually to perform it. Despite his strong determination, he found himself continually peeping into that turned-down page, and every time he looked the old yearning came over him, and the deep unrest that had been his for nearly four years filled him. It was this desire to look once more and for the last time upon that forbidden page that impelled his footsteps back again to Australia. But he found the memory was but the more deeply imprinted on his heart by his nearness to old associations.

Yes, Roger Northbrook loved a woman, and that woman was to him forbidden, because she was another man's wife. Though, when he knew it, he had already learned to love her, and the knowledge came to him too late for his peace. He went away, it is true, to put the temptation far beyond his reach, but it was not distance that could heal his heart-ache; he would have to go deeper than that—go to the centre of his own soul and deal with the matter there. He knew well that man alone was the only real judge of his own actions, the decreer of his fate, his flagellator or rewarder, and now, in the capacity of judge, Roger Northbrook unhesitatingly condemned himself. He

was wiser now and felt his own unworthiness as judged from his higher consciousness, and though Love still tugged at his heart-strings for the woman who had won his first real regard, yet, when he discovered her secret, his duty to himself as a self-respecting man, to the woman because she was unprotected, and to the man even, who was her husband, although he had deserted her and her little child and left them penniless so that she had to earn her own livelihood—prompted him to make the sacrifice.

It was during an attack of malaria fever which Roger Northbrook contracted while visiting the sugar plantations in Northern Queensland that he first met Nurse Mysia Grayson. He was taken to a private hospital, where she was one of the nurses, and to her charge he was committed. She was a sweetly pretty girl, not more than twenty-four, fair and blue-eyed, gentle, graceful, loveable, and with a bright and sunny nature that was altogether bewitching and she was withal so refined and sensible in speech and act that it was quite a delight to have her sweet presence flitting about his bedside. Nurse Mysia was always so neat and dainty in appearance, so silent and gentle in all she did for him, that he unconsciously found his man's heart going out to his lovely young nurse unknown to himself.

There is nothing that draws a man closer to a woman than the fact of her having nursed him through a long and severe illness. To him henceforth she is a veritable angel of Mercy, a saint in woman's form. Indeed, so grateful does the average man feel for all the little acts of kindness, devotion, sympathy, unselfishness, and unceasing care, bestowed upon him at that period when he is as helpless as a babe, that his heart is more inclined to worship at the feet of the goddess of the sick-room than at those of a princess. The strongest and most self-reliant then become the weakest. The most practical materialist finds then that he has a sentimental and emotional side to his character, and he is apt to be as a little child

when the soft arms of a woman enfold him in time of pain and physical weakness, be that woman mother, wife, sister, or stranger. Those arms are once more to a man as the arms of the mother whose early caresses were the first impressions he received of life. Those gentle touches are as the ministrations of that gentlest of all creatures to him—the tender, devoted, loving and self-sacrificing mother! She, on whose soft bosom he has lain, be he king or peasant! She to whose devoted care he owes his existence, though he may in manhood scoff, deride and neglect or cruelly ill-treat the sex who represent the motherhood of the race! How much owest thou to thy mother? How much, oh! mother, hast thou given unto thy son? Let the history of future generations tell, since as the mothers of to-day, so will be the sons of the future. The day is now at hand when it will be imperative that mothers give of their best on all planes of being, to those they shall bear, for what a responsibility is theirs! Yea, what a grand, a glorious, wondrous privilege it is to be the Mother of a MAN!—a very god in embryo! It is the holiest, sweetest thing in life, for verily a “partnership with God is Motherhood!”

So Roger Northbrook learned to love his dainty nurse, and as his illness was rather prolonged and the doctors ordered him to the Mountains to recuperate, with Nurse Mysia as his attendant, there was plenty of opportunity for him to strengthen the attachment which grew so strongly through all those months of weakness. When he told her of his love one day at Katoomba Falls, and asked her to be his wife, he was surprised to receive a refusal, kind but firm, and when he pressed her for an explanation she begged him not to insist upon it, but to believe that she would not pain him thus were it in her power to answer otherwise. She did not deny that she loved him, nor yet did she admit it, but her manner led him to hope, and he determined when he was better and they had returned to town that he would endeavor to overcome her scruples, for Roger believed it was because of the

difference in their social positions that made Nurse Mysia refuse him.

It happened one day that he met her in the Botanical Gardens, and again pleaded his suit hopelessly, but, being persistent, he was not so easily dismissed. A heavy thunderstorm came on and Roger insisted in placing Mysia in a cab and sending her home. By this means he obtained her private address, for at this time she was on her holidays. Consequently, on Christmas Eve he decided to give her a surprise, and went out to the little cottage where she lived with an old nurse, who told him on enquiry that Nurse Mysia had gone down to the riverside. Roger hurried to the spot, glad to have the opportunity for a quiet talk and to give her the beautiful gift he had brought her with his own hands. He found her seated on a grassy bank under a shrub, with her head bent over a piece of work, but she did not notice his approach till he stood quite close to her side, and in eager tones said :

" Mysia, Mysia ! I have come."

The girl looked up with a startled glance and was about to speak when suddenly a child's shrill, frightened cry rang out from the direction of the river, and, turning, they beheld a boy's sunny curls bobbing up and down some few feet from the bank.

With a terrified cry, the woman shrieked, as she ran towards the bank.

" Save him ! Oh ! save my child ! "

She would have rushed in after the little fellow, had Roger not caught her skirts and held her back forcibly, saying in a hoarse voice and with a peculiar look in his eyes :

" Is the child yours ? "

" Yes, yes, mine ! My little Reggie ! Quick, quick, for God's sake save him ! "

While she was speaking the man had thrown off his coat and dashed in after the struggling boy, and then with a few swift strong strokes had brought him safely to land. The woman snatched the unconscious form of the little three-year-old laddie from the man's

dripping arms and, laying him on her lap, began to undress him and try and restore consciousness ; but her trembling fingers impeded her movements, till the man bent down and did the work for her in silence. Neither spoke till the boy had opened his big blue eyes and cried faintly :

“ Mamma, mamma ! ”

“ I am here, my darling. Thank God you are saved ! You know me ? ”

And with passionate caresses she hugged the little limp form of the child close to her bosom, while the man stood by silent, watching the whole proceeding and thinking thoughts that were very far from pleasant.

Explanations were sought some days afterwards and a very distressing scene ensued, for the man loved the woman too dearly to give her up. He did not even mind then had the presence of her child spelt shame for her in the past : his love was great enough, large enough to cover it all ; he would give her his name and take her and her child away where no one would know them, and she should be happy. She almost consented that night, only he had made one stipulation, “ he asked for no names, only that no other man has a legal claim upon you. That you are *not another man's wife.* ”

Then she bid him leave her and she would write to him in a few days and give him a definite answer, for the sad part of it all was that the woman loved this man as dearly—yes, more dearly—than he loved her ; but—but—the pity of it was, *she was another man's wife.*

He got the promised letter at his club containing the news, the whole story of her life from childhood, and explained the cruel desertion of her husband seven months before her child was born ; how he had forsaken her after squandering the large fortune left her by her father, who had, with his last breath given her to the man who had treated her thus, believing that he had left his only child safe in the loving protection of a good husband. She told how she had ever

since had to struggle to earn a living for her baby and herself, and how her heart had become embittered against the father of that child till she was only conscious of one desire in life and that was never to see his face again.

To this letter she signed her married name, and this was the first time Roger Northbrook had heard it. The blow that fell upon his heart at the news the letter contained—the fact that Mysia, his adored little sweetheart, was the wife of another, was accentuated by the knowledge that now flashed upon him, for he knew that that other man had once been his friend.

That same week Roger Northbrook left for England without even trying to see Nurse Mysia again, nor did he write to her. He just deliberately set himself to stamp this passion out of his heart, and thought by running away from it, by fresh faces and other scenes, he might learn to forget what to him was a most humiliating thought—he loved another man's wife. Had he really believed in his heart that he was strong enough to stay and yet be loyal to himself and his old time friend, it is doubtful whether he would have departed thus without a word of farewell; but he felt he could not face the ordeal when he recollected the last scene between them, and the delicious thrill he had experienced, that still vibrated through every nerve of his body, when he had for the first time taken her in his arms and on those sweet lips of hers, so full and red, pressed the first long clinging ardent kiss he had ever given a woman. Then when later he had almost forced his love upon her in the face of all appearances, and she had lain so passively in his close embrace, he knew that from that hour she was his had he persisted in his wooing. He knew now that she would not be able to resist his pleadings were he ever to yield to his heart's desire again. He knew that he doubted her now, and therefore doubted himself more. So to be true to himself he put the ocean between himself and his forbidden love.

There was also another motive ruling him, but of a secondary nature. It was that she was the wife of his friend that had been, so that it was doubly his duty to defend her under all circumstances, even from himself if need be, and not knowingly dishonor her by word, thought, or act, rather should it be his pride to protect her now that the husband had failed in his duty as a man and a husband: it was not his to take advantage of that failure. So with a strong inner resolve he vowed never to dishonor the wife of one whom he had called friend and brother Mason; and that vow was as the oath of a Man.

It was during these times of testing that Roger Northbrook began to seriously question his real feelings for Mysia Grayson. And it was this self-examination that made him seek quiet and solitude this afternoon away by himself in the depth of the bush. He had lately come to the conclusion that his feelings towards his lovely little sweetheart were not such as were truly worthy of his highest conception of himself; that they savored purely of the desires of the flesh and were not hallowed by the guiding powers of the spiritual, or even at all times balanced by the moral qualities of his mind. It was purely the emotional and sensuous part of his nature that had responded to the loveliness of Mysia, for he was well aware that she was his inferior on all planes of being, except that most seductive one to a man—her adorable femininity. She was not a fitting mental companion for a man like himself; she had no intellectual attainments above the merest average, and certainly no pronounced views upon any particular subject, though at the time he first saw her, that, to him constituted one of her chiefest charms, for she was simply an echo of himself in everything; she would see with his eyes, hear with his ears, and be guided by his voice in all things as he desired or commanded—truly excellent qualities in a woman, most men will say, but at this particular stage of his development as a soul they were not all that a

man like Roger Northbrook required from the woman who should share his life.

Why was it, though, he found himself still unable to crush the longing for her out of his breast? He asked himself what place in his life, now that he knew himself better, would that sweet little woman be fitted to fill? Must he be plainly frank with himself? Yes. Then there was but one for her, and that was just as a beautiful female mate, who would bear him finely developed physical images of himself, and who would be a devoted mother.

But, he argued, was that all a man asked nowadays from the one who was to share his every mood, his most cherished ambitions, and enter into the depths of his highest nature as only a woman can? Would a sweet-natured and beautiful animal, with all the charms imaginable, be a fitting mother for his children when it is mentality that rules the world to-day—not physical strength? Then the true gift of the parent to-day is the gift of mental power, and even fathers take more pride in the brainy child of the family than the handsome one. Then was it not from the mothers of the past that the race received its highest and noblest traits of character? Did not all the great men in history owe their successes to their mothers, either mentally or morally? And it was only where the mother was a passive agent as the wife of a strong-minded man that the father's qualities were reproduced in the son. Was it not the mothers who moulded the race, who nursed at their breasts the future generations, and by the pre-natal influence bestowed upon their sons and daughters gave us the men and women we find to-day, be they good or ill?

Then as this is an age of intellect and consequent progress, is it meet that a man should retard the upward, onward trend of humanity by deliberately pandering to a sensuous desire alone—the desire to embrace through ownership, a woman merely because she possesses that animal attraction for him above all others; a desire which makes him indifferent to the

demands of his higher nature, which by repeated punishments and bitter experiences urges him to rule the kingdom of his body wisely and well, to let mind dictate to matter and not become a slave to his own baser self.

When a man marries a woman because she is fair to look upon and her body symmetrical, while at the same time he knows that her mind is shallow and vapid, and that she is no fitting mate for him if he be highly developed mentally, morally and spiritually, then that man is heaping up sorrow for himself in the future. Is it meet that he should allow such to bring forth hostages to fortune for him, knowing that such must be wanting in all the finer qualities that go to produce nobler, grander men and women than the generation gone before? It is the duty of every soul to endeavor to build up rather than pull down the race and cause a reversion to species: since it is within the power of all to press forward to the higher mark which evolves a New Kingdom—the Divine.

During that hour of soul-communing through which Roger Northbrook was passing that hot November afternoon, as he sat on the moss-grown trunk of a fallen tree, deep in the shade of the silent bush, there did chance to cross his mind the idea of what his attitude towards Mysia would have been now had he married her at that initial stage of his love for her. It was true, he was often conscious of a deep longing to clasp her in his arms again and kiss the sweet pensive lips and see the love-light dance in her great blue eyes, and by wooing tenderness induce her to whisper that she loved him, as he knew in his heart she did when he left her. But he had been continually striving to crush out this lower and lesser passion, good though it undoubtedly was and pure, too, of its kind at the time it was born within his heart. Still, it was born of the lower self, and since its birth a higher had revealed itself and this was immortal and divine, therefore the mortal and human must die that the highest alone should live and come to perfection on

every plane of his being, since the higher, the divine, alone would satisfy his soul now.

He wondered, if he had been wedded to Mysia Grayson, would he have developed as he had done during these last two years? And if such had been the case, would it also have been possible for him to be content? Would he have felt no want, no dissatisfaction with the unfitness of his conjugal partner to fill the higher demands of his being? Would the Mysia of that day have been sufficient for the Roger of to-day? He doubted it, unless he had been able to draw her upwards also on to the plane where he then stood; but, strangely enough, that is not always possible, for those who are wedded are less likely to learn anything new from each other than from strangers.

It was with such thoughts as these that Roger Northbrook's mind was filled and greatly perturbed while he sat musing with bent head and hands clasped between his knees. He had about come to the end of his cogitations, and thought of strolling back in the direction of the homestead, so as to be in time for dinner, when his ears caught the sound of a horse's hoof-beats approaching. Looking up quickly, he beheld Edna Esbourne riding towards him, threading her way between the trees, though evidently she had not yet observed his presence, for he was still seated on the fallen log, and from the direction she was taking it was probable she would have passed without noticing him there, for her head was bent as though she was lost in thought and her horse was leisurely walking. Roger felt a strange thrill come over him as he saw her, and, rising, moved towards her with a smile of glad welcome as she recognised him. Reining in her horse, she slipped from the saddle before he could reach her and came quickly across the twig-strewn ground, leading her mare by the bridle, her face beaming with pleasure as they greeted each other almost simultaneously:

"What are you doing here, so far from home?" she cried.

"Is this the highway from 'Warrimoo' to 'Cumbooqueepa'?" he asked.

"No, but I wanted a quiet ride without fear of company, so I took the short cut through the bush —" she began.

"Only to stumble across the company more effectually, as it happens," he interrupted. "I am so pleased to have met you, though."

"So am I delighted to find you here," she said frankly. "But what brought you all this way from home on such a hot day?"

"The same impulse that prompted you to return this way," he answered, smiling. "But you're not in a hurry now, I hope, to get back, are you?"

"No, not particularly. There is plenty of time; it is quite early yet, I think. Besides, we can walk slowly together," said Edna.

"No, can we not sit down here, where I have spent the last two hours, and have one of our talks?" he pleaded. "You know I seldom see you alone since our friends have arrived, and don't forget that I must take my leave next week."

"Oh! so soon!" she exclaimed, in dismay. "I had hoped you would be staying till after Christmas. There is so much I want to say to you, so many things I would like to discuss with you and ask your help and advice about," she said, as she fastened her horse's bridle to the saddle and allowed it to browse near, while, in accordance with Roger's wish, she seated herself on the log by his side, gathering her habit around her and pulling off her riding gauntlets to cool her hands, for the evening was still hot though it was now nearly six o'clock.

"What a strange coincidence that I should have come this way and met you here!" she observed. "How do you account for it?" she asked, looking into his face with a smile.

"I think it was mental telepathy," he replied. "I was thinking about you and wishing we might have

another long talk together as we did that first morning we met by the pool."

"Yes; then it was your wish that brought me this way, for I admit I was strongly impelled to come through the bush, even against my desire almost, since to avoid the heat I could have hastened along the track and been home quite an hour ago."

"And you are not sorry, I hope?" he queried.

"No, you are fully aware of the delight I take in a talk with you. They have been far too few and broken lately," she admitted, "so I shall look upon this as an oasis in the bush."

They both laughed at the simile, and then Edna said, looking full into his face, with her keen questioning gaze:

"But you—you have not accounted fully for your presence here? Have you been reading?" noticing the book in his hands, and taking it from him, she opened it to find that it was a pocket edition of Robert Browning's poems. "Ah! dear old Browning!" she exclaimed, her face softening and her eyes lighting up with pleasure as she spoke. "He understood these beautiful truths of ours, I am sure."

"Yes. He and his clever wife were great admirers of Emmanuel Swedenborg's writings; and I think, with many others, they imbibed his teachings. He really was the revelator of these latter day Truths. They are actually the doctrines of Swedenborg in a modified form, and labelled 'New Thought,'" said Roger Northbrook.

"I have not had the opportunity of reading much of Swedenborg's philosophy, though the little I did read whetted my appetite for more. When I can I must take the whole course and study his works carefully. Now that you tell me that he was the one who opened the way for us to reach these spiritual heights, I shall take greater interest in his writings," affirmed Edna.

"You will have a big undertaking before you if you attempt to wade through his most voluminous

works. He has written such quantities, and every page is teeming with seed-thoughts," responded Roger.

"I always thought of Swedenborg as a Spiritualist," said Edna. "I don't know why I assumed he was such, for I know very little, if indeed anything, about spiritualism in the popular sense of the term. I have been rather inclined to avoid anything that savored of it; I had classed it in my mind with charlatanism."

"The old idea of Spiritualism certainly was looked upon as such, and I do not think Swedenborg's influence was as great as it might have been in his own day, chiefly owing to the fact that he openly admitted having constant communion with beings in other spheres. He would be better understood in the present day, though, for his very works have prepared the minds of thinkers for the revelations that he has described. He was a prophet of the New Kingdom—the Kingdom of Love—but men were not ready to receive his prophecies any more than they were those of the Prophets of old," asserted Roger.

"Then you really think that we may be guided and taught by higher intelligences?" questioned Edna eagerly.

"Well, individually, I would not assert that such was possible, but from my observations and reading I would be willing to admit that it might be probable. Indeed, to some highly-strung organisms it is claimed to have frequently occurred—Swedenborg, for instance. No one can dispute that as evidence," he answered.

"Oh! I am so delighted to hear you speak thus; to know that you think it possible. I shall not mind telling you about my attempts in the field of literature now. At first I was afraid you might think it was too presumptuous and perhaps egotistical. But now, now I think you would understand it and the spirit in which it is written."

"I shall only be too delighted to have the privilege of seeing anything from your pen. Knowing your high ideals, I could never class anything you wrote as

egotistical—you would always give of your best, I am certain," responded Roger Northbrook, as he looked gravely at her eager face flushed with a new hope.

Then she told him of the various efforts she had made to attain some success in literary work, and how her early attempts were rewarded. Then concluded, "And now that I have grasped the principles of this New Thought, it is my one, my dearest hope to be able to spread it abroad, to tell others what peace and joy I have found. I cannot go forth as Jesus did and preach, but I can write about it. And oh! if you could only help me by giving me your advice about the merits of the work I have already done I shall thank you with my whole soul, Mr. Northbrook."

"You have only to express the wish and I am at your service. You do not need my assurance of interest in anything that concerns you, I feel sure. We are more than ordinary friends, I hope, for ours is a soul companionship." And as Roger spoke he laid his hand upon hers, where it rested upon the log at his side, and she did not withdraw it, but said gently, with gravely earnest eyes:

"Yes, we are travelling souls seeking one common goal—our Divine Source—and it should ever be our pleasure and privilege to help each other on the homeward way."

Just then for one brief moment the impulse came to Roger Northbrook to tell this strong, tender-souled woman what it was that had brought about the dispeace in his heart and mind—to pour out his story to her and hear what she would say, what she would advise in a case like his, for though he had been all the afternoon analyzing his heart's yearnings and deepest desires, he had not yet arrived at any definite conclusion regarding himself and his own future. He had not quite succeeded in putting Mysia's memory away, yet he found himself not desiring her so intensely. There was a war going on in his breast—a battle of the Kings, the four against five. The five senses against the four planes of consciousness. This battle he must

fight and win before he could seek his Melchizedek or Prince of Peace and find the peace for his soul that it craved.

While Roger was mentally debating within himself whether he would open his heart to Edna, she spoke, and the opportunity was lost to him.

"I was just thinking of what you said about Swedenborg," she observed. "Do you know that I have written a strange article or sketch, I call it, that I am certain I did not write with my normal brain. It savors of psychic control in a very marked degree, and it has always puzzled me to know where I got the thought that I expressed there without the slightest hesitation when I wrote it."

"What is the name of the sketch," inquired Roger, in a rather half-hearted voice, for he was conscious of regret at his lost opportunity.

"I called it 'Controlled!' Why, I don't know," she said.

"You will let me see this sketch, will you not?" he asked.

"Yes, I will give it to you to-night—or, better still, I should like to read it to you myself, as I have it in a book which I call 'My Brain-Book,' because I jot down there any stray thought that occurs to me, and sometimes the ideas flow so rapidly that my handwriting suffers in consequence. You might not be able to read the one I refer to," she said, with an arch look at him.

"Why?" he asked, with an amused smile. "Is it so intoxicated?"

"Perhaps that is exactly what you would declare it, both in character and chirography," she answered, with a merry laugh. "However, we shall wait till you hear it, then we shall talk about its sanity, or, I should say, that of the writer."

"What other subjects have you written upon? Or have you a favorite one? Most writers have," he inquired.

"Well ——." Edna paused, hesitated, and then,

seeing he expected her answer, continued almost shyly: "Well, you will no doubt think me bold in attempting to handle such subjects; you who have done so much good work and have seen so much of the world of men and manners. You will possibly think I am too inexperienced to know much about them, or at least not sufficient to attempt to teach others, but you cannot know how very strongly I feel upon them, so strongly, in fact, that I have often wished that my duty lay in a different sphere in life so that I might go forth into the world and teach and help my suffering sisters. Well, Mr. Northbrook, up till the time I grasped the Higher Life principles my favorite subjects have been, 'The Disabilities of Woman,' and—and—'Marriage'—Modern Marriage, I mean, such as we see around us to-day." She paused, and, looking up in his face, asked wistfully, "I hope you are not greatly shocked at my presumption—are you?"

"No," he replied promptly, answering her look with a smile. "How could I be, knowing you as I think I do? I am not surprised that an enthusiast like yourself should take up the first subject most readily. But the second----." Here he paused, deliberating how he should express his thought without hurting her, and as he did so Edna scrutinized his countenance keenly, critically, while the shadow of a smile hovered round her mouth, till he continued in calm and measured tones:

"Well, the second: that is one which I should imagine required some personal experience to enable even a woman to speak or write upon, with any claim to authority. You have to be very convinced yourself and therefore very convincing before you can grip the minds of your readers. You must have been in a position to see the necessity for an alteration in the present day Marriage Laws before you can impress them with the idea that they are not all they should be, or, being so, would be improved by altering. Well, to be frank with you," he added, "I really think the woman who tackled the subject anticipating any

lasting success attending her efforts would have to go through the mill first herself."

"True," admitted Edna, with a nervous quiver in her voice, while a quick flush mounted to her brow and as quickly subsided as she continued, "But granted experience is necessary in the case of the latter, still the two subjects are so closely related that to deal adequately with the one you must necessarily include the other."

"You would infer, then, that Marriage is necessary to complete woman—is really what she was created for?" he questioned, looking keenly at her as she spoke.

"Marriage? Yes, true marriage! Marriage as God meant it; not as man has made it. I mean the marriage of souls, not merely the union of bodies. To woman has been entrusted the greater mysteries of Creation, for motherhood is a partnership with God Himself. When woman's true era dawns, man will behold great and new wonders. We are on the verge of that New Day now, and the Fall of Man but heralds the Rise of Woman. As Adam's hour and power wanes Eve's creation and reign will begin. Woman is that which has been visible yet in essence has been hidden, and in reality can only be revealed when the masculine nature is asleep. When Man, or Intellect, is no longer self-assertive, then will woman, or Intuition, rise to her proper plane, and, so rising, lift man with her. If Man allows woman (as he eventually must for his own salvation) to take her proper place in the universal order of the divine Creative plan—to be as one with himself—he will find that she has all along contained the highest and grandest attributes of his own complex nature, and in turn he will be to her the highest possible conception of the Deity. He will see in her when regenerated his own Higher Self—his Divine Self objectified—as she also will see him. But not till he awakens from his Adam sleep of sense-consciousness. Not till then will he be able to behold her as his wife—the new and higher creation, called EVE!"

As Edna was speaking, in her usual quick, flowing style, Roger Northbrook had sat watching her face, and its expression of inspirational power struck him forcibly, and he wondered what were the peculiar influences at work in this woman's mind and heart to lead her to think on such unusual lines. She was but a girl, comparatively speaking, and by what means could she have garnered such advanced thoughts upon the subject of Woman regenerated?

"May I ask you, Miss Esbourne, where you have gathered those decidedly advanced ideas on the subject of woman?" he asked.

"I do not know myself, except that they just come out from within myself when I read and think," she replied.

"Do you know that you have just voiced one of the great truths which, if we could get the world really to recognise and practice, would bring more happiness into their lives and it would do more than any other reforms could effect? It is not separation of the sexes, but more equality, greater trust and confidence between men and women that is needed to save the world to-day. This is one of the subjects which I have turned quite round in favor of within the last two years. Give woman her moral and social freedom, I say!" concluded Roger, seriously.

"Oh! Mr. Northbrook!" she exclaimed, delightedly, "how seldom it is you hear a man speak as you have just done. So few men are brave—yes, I say brave—enough to admit that the laws which they have made and demand that woman shall obey, and which she has had no say in the making of, are not the very best laws under the circumstances. That is, that they do not ensure the greatest good for the greatest number, and this I think applies more particularly to the Marriage laws than to any others which woman is at present laboring under."

"I regret to admit that I have seen this, too, during my life's experiences, and my observations of the lives of others. But then what remedy have we to

offer for all these seeming injustices and the many disabilities under which woman labors?" he queried.

"Ah! that is just it," rejoined Edna quickly. "We have as a race progressed in most departments, and have repealed old laws dealing with trade and commerce generally, also punishment for crimes of a certain character; indeed, all such matters have received the best attention from our most able politicians for many generations back; yet they will not give the most vital question of our advanced civilization any really serious consideration. They allow that the laws laid down by Moses for the guidance of a semi-barbaric race, such as the Children of Israel were in those days, are quite sufficient to meet all the exigencies of the present-day mental, moral, social and spiritual development of mankind!"

"And you for one consider they are not?" he suggested quietly.

"No. They have continued to say for generations such words as 'Whom God hath joined together let not man put asunder,' over every man and woman who have entered into the bonds of matrimony, and yet they—or we—must be conscious of the inefficacy of these same laws to meet the needs of all cases, since they also allow that to support this poor weak Marriage law they must introduce the saving law of Divorce. Yet," she continued hotly, almost indignantly, "though God has admittedly joined these two persons indissolubly together 'till death them do part,' still Man, in the form of a Judge, can, under certain circumstances, put them asunder! What is the use of the form of words, 'till death them do part,' when another farcical and parrot-like utterance can dissolve them just as effectually as death? I affirm that if *any* man or *any* woman can break these bonds asunder under *any* conditions, then God's laws are subject to man's whims. The plain fact of the matter is this: God *never* had a hand or voice in making the contract that bound these two together, if a man, be he whomsoever he may, can ever separate

them. It is nothing but a farce from beginning to end, and these same laws are simply man-made, man-blessed, and to many thousands of men and women *cursed* ”

She paused. Having risen, she paced up and down before Roger where he sat, speaking the while in rapid excited, yet earnest tones that conveyed to the ear of her listener the impression that she spoke from a sincere conviction of the truth of every word which she had uttered. She appeared much agitated and as though smarting under a wrong herself or feeling the reflex wrong done to another. She did not, however, give him time to make any observations then upon her remarks, but, lifting her head, said hastily, as she looked at her watch :

“ But we must be making towards home now ; it is nearly seven and will take an hour to walk from here.” Then she went over and called her horse, which looked up intelligently and came to her at the sound of her voice. “ Come, Mr. Northbrook,” she added, “ I am ready.”

“ Will you not mount ? ” he asked.

“ No, I prefer to walk and talk with you. ‘ Fire-fly ’ will follow us.”

CHAPTER XII.

ADVANCED VIEWS VOICED.

“ Ideas are the world’s regenerators. He or she who thinks revolutionises history, and reforms mankind. . . . A great thought is more valuable than great wealth. Men have fought for ideas more than they have for riches. Think for yourself.”
—“ MIND.”

“ Mr. Northbrook,” said Edna, as they walked together through the bush in the direction of the home-stead, “ I hope you will not altogether misunderstand my remarks of a few minutes since. There is a reason for them, as you may perhaps conjecture, and although I do not usually voice my views upon these subjects, I do write upon them frequently. This evening, I

cannot tell why, something came over me that caused me to forget my customary reserve, and to you I have opened one of the doors of my heart and revealed an apartment which contains some of my deepest and most serious thoughts. I may have shocked you—an Englishman—but I do not seem to mind that even, for I feel somehow that you understand, and to be understood by one human soul is better than to be applauded by a thousand. To me sympathy is the dearest, the sweetest thing upon earth, and under a true fellow-sympathy, though it be given by one alone, we grow as souls more rapidly than among hosts of so-called friends in flourishing worldly conditions. Some day, yes, if we still remain good friends—more than friends, I hope—comrades—and something tells me we shall—then I will let you know the circumstances in my life which laid the foundation of my ideas on Marriage and Divorce.”

“I most ardently hope that you will always continue to honor me with a place among your friends, Miss Esbourne,” responded Roger, feelingly. “Indeed, I would wish to be in every sense of the term, as you say, a comrade. Wherever and whenever I can be of any assistance, or render you any help that lies in my power, I hope you will never hesitate to command me. This is a privilege I have often longed for—to have a real woman comrade, since I am fully convinced from what I know of life and men in general that a man is always a better man if he has for a friend a good and high-minded woman.”

“Yes, I am sure you are right there. But there needs to be more harmony between the sexes first; they require to know each other in the only true way, the way I was speaking about a while ago. It will not be till these discordant jars between the masculine and feminine are removed that there can be any true marriages on earth. Do you know a thought that has just occurred to me?” she added, with a bright upward glance into his face.

“No, tell me; I love to hear these inspirational

thoughts of yours, they are generally original," he returned, smiling.

"Well, I just thought that the discordant conditions existing between the sexes represent on the visible plane that same quarrel which is also taking place on the subjective plane. I mean, the quarrel between the intellectual and inspirational faculties of the individual. That is, the intellect is continually trying to suppress the intuition ; to hold it in bondage, as it were, and keep it in subjection (just as man does woman) and until there is an at-one-ment between these two inner natures in mankind there will hardly ever be anything else but strife between their visible representatives—the masculine and feminine—in humanity."

"But this will require time and patient cultivation on the part of the individual. You know what Emerson says, 'No man can learn what he has not had preparation for learning. Our eyes are holden that we cannot see things that stare us in the face, until the hour arrives when the mind is ripened.' You nor I did not always see with the clarified vision we do now—did we?" he said.

"No, of course not," she admitted. "I have proved that it is only when we arrive at a certain elevation that we can actually see what we have had under our very noses, as it were, all the time. The other seeing was but a groping in the dark, and so we make blunders and mistakes which we have to bear the consequences of, or patiently undo, in after life. This is what is meant, I think, by 'working out our salvation with fear and trembling.' It means a general clearing up, a gathering in of the gleanings in the field of life ; a separating of the grain from the stubble, the wheat from the tares ; but, alas ! sometimes we find that some of the seeds sown in our years of ignorance and blindness have to be reaped by us at times when we wish it were otherwise, for innocent ones suffer by the products of these harvests of wild oats sown by us

in our thoughtless hours," and she shook her head, while a note of deep regret stole into her voice.

"Yes," he responded, "there is so much ignorance prevailing in the minds of the people. Yet there is no remedy possible that will heal their diseases in this respect other than the very experiences they are gaining by such reappings. It seems a pity that it is so; but I fear no other remedy would have the desired effect. All the teaching and preaching in the world will not make men moral if they do not desire to be so. Each man and woman has to live out his or her own life in his or her own particular way; not anyone else can live it for them. Each is distinctive from the rest, though so similar from a general standpoint. You may tell people what you think constitutes happiness and how in your opinion they may be happy; but nevertheless it is only your opinion, and may not be theirs; it might not be happiness to them at their particular stage of soul development, though it has proved all that *you* could desire."

"You are right there in what you say, for I have found it so in my short experience," said Edna. "And I think the same statement applies to marriage. There might be so many aching hearts and wrecked lives saved if persons could be saved by advice; if men and women were willing to take advice and act upon it. But because advice is free, is cheap, nobody wants it; they much prefer to buy their own experience and pay dearly for it into the bargain. Really, I for one cannot blame them, for it is the only lesson in life worth having; it may taste bitter when we have to take it, but, like a dose of nasty medicine, it does us good in the end. There is one thing, though, that I think we all ought to be, even when purchasing our experience, and that is honest with each other. For instance, if when two persons or one of two find that they have made a mistake by taking the wrong half of their soul as their life's partner, if they would only be true and brave enough to admit it to each other, and not continue in a life-long bondage, they

would at least no longer feel hypocrites, for I do not think that there is any greater soul-crippler than hypocrisy." Edna paused, and before she could resume, Roger interposed :

"It takes some courage to do that I should imagine, especially if the other half has not realized the fact and continues to find all their happiness in the society and love of the other."

"There are, of course, some souls, I know, who awaken to the true meaning of life sooner than others, and they often find themselves bound, as it were, to a block of wood. How then can the spirit be in perfect unity with the flesh unless that flesh is willing to be crucified that the spirit may live for ever? The highest must ever rule. If a soul awakens to a consciousness of life, while bound to a partner who is still dead to the things of the spirit, then that one should endeavor as far as possible to open the eyes of the other to the light that is theirs: chiefly by the purity and good example of their own lives, as well as by loving thoughts and words of truth. But, if the eyes of the other cannot be opened, and the union, that is no union, of these two beings tends to become a continual discord, then I consider that the illumined soul is not bound to remain in bondage to the things of sense—the lust of the flesh—but, as it must climb higher and still higher to its eternal home, all that obstructs its pathway or that will not climb with it must be left behind. To its Creator alone it has to answer, not to any worldly tribunal, and for itself alone must it first give an account before it can become even its brother's keeper. To my mind," she continued more earnestly, "in the union of two persons who are ignorant of anything higher than the things of this visible plane, the forms and ceremonies of the world are essential, as a training school for their souls and to answer the needs of their present stage of development. Such know no better and desire no more; indeed, anything greater or nobler would be lost upon them till they have come out of or beyond that

degree of growth. There is, however, a time, in this life or another, when this awakening takes place, this is then the beginning of trouble in their world. Jesus referred to this when He said, 'I (meaning the Divine Consciousness) came not to bring peace into the world, but a sword: for I am come to set a man at variance against his father and the daughter against her mother,' and even the so-called husband and wife, in the world's estimation, against each other, though this is not to be wondered at, for, of course, in the eyes of the Lord such are not true husband and wife, or else nothing could divide them. Only true soul-union constitutes the Divine Marriage.

Roger had listened in amazement at the volubility and ease with which this remarkable speech was uttered by the woman who stepped quietly by his side. In the silent bush, the shadows were now lengthening as the sun sank across the far western plains of the Riverina. Edna held her dark blue riding habit around her and carried her whip in her left hand, while on her wealth of silver hair the plain felt riding hat sat well and was most becoming. Altogether she was still a decidedly handsome woman. As Roger looked upon her he saw what to him was most admirable in a woman, Character—which is the stamp upon the soul of the free choice it has made of good or evil during many earth-lives. In this instance it was strongly marked, though as yet not fully developed. She certainly possessed powers of which she was but yet dimly conscious; powers which promised to be of a very high order. This fact the quick eye of the man, who was a close student of human nature, readily detected. He wished to hear all that she was willing to say upon this to him most interesting subject, so he observed regretfully, in response to her last remarks:

"Ah! Miss Esbourne, if your high ideals could only be realized, it would make a man feel that life was indeed worth living, and love and marriage the most desirable things in the world. To most people it seems a lottery that is so uncertain in results that they

do not care to risk it. Even those whom we believe have entered into the bonds for love only do not always find it turn out all they anticipate."

"Then if that which is termed 'love,' and includes faith in each other, cannot ensure a man and woman living together in peace and harmony till the end of their earth lives, not all the laws of the Medes and Persians, or even enlightened England, will succeed in effecting the desired end. They are supposed to be marrying each other according to the modern conception of what constitutes a reason for marriage for '*Love only*,' but what a travesty on the holy word are ninety-nine out of every hundred of such unions! Is it not a cause for wonder that as they already are supposed to have true love as the strongest binding link to unite them, they should consider there was any necessity for another, such as vows and legal ceremonies? A chain is no stronger than its weakest link, and is it not a positive proof that the majority of marriages to-day are not welded by that strong link Love? So it is not any wonder that in time of strain and stress they have to depend for support upon that weakest link of all, Legal Bonds, to hold them together. Then is it any wonder so many matrimonial chains are snapping? Why, we can hear the reports of their sundering links from all parts of the English-speaking dominions, and they are increasing to such an extent that it has now become quite a roar that is almost deafening to sensitive ears, only that, like thunder, you become accustomed to hearing it and after a time cease to notice the reports. But when this is coupled with the clanking of the shackles of those who are still in bondage and are chafing under their life-long fetters, or moaning and sighing for the day of release from their self-imposed slavery, ah! then is it any wonder the hearts of such lookers-on as you and I should ache for their pain and yearn with deep earnest longing that we might be able to help them?" She paused momentarily, but without giving him time to reply, continued even more vigorously:

“ Then there are those awful domestic tragedies which, like lightning flashes, dart out from behind the dark threatening clouds which hang ominously over the matrimonial horizon, and startle us from our lethargy. Is this not due to the over-pressure that is put upon these helpless beings, who, through their own ignorance find themselves slaves to a law that forces them to live with a person whom they have probably learned to hate with a fierce and bitter hatred, which is as a poison to their souls and sears their hearts as with a hot iron. Otherwise they must accept the only other alternative, such as imprisonment for desertion if it be a man's case, or such other condign punishment as the law may decree. Can we wonder they rebel? Can we blame them if they take the law into their own hands—that law they have unconsciously helped to make, like a lash to whip them. Can we wonder they get it into their untutored minds that the condition is unendurable, and so hopelessly wreck two lives, or more, in their futile efforts to right one. Then, only think, that this, all this horror and misery might have been avoided, lives might have been saved, perhaps eventually redeemed and blest, if they could have seen any loop-hole of escape in the near future, even if it had been at the termination of several years. Anything, yes, anything except that most objectionable method to a sensitive or refined woman, or even man, the hateful publicity, exposure and disgrace of the divorce courts. Truly of two evils they choose the lesser. For one is swift and sure and certain death to the body at any rate, while the other is slow torture that defies endurance in a highly-strung person, or else social ostracism for one or both probably; with the other alternative for the wrong-doer, a Bohemian life of ‘don't-care.’ In face of such examples of the effects of the divorce laws, it would seem as though the law simply offered inducements to immoral persons to get rid of their responsibilities per medium of the divorce courts. It is the physician of questionable reputation who patches up the wounds and flaws which

the parsons and lawyers have made in the matrimonial organism. But, like present-day religion, I am afraid it is often but a cloak to cover a multitude of immoralities. With such a queer state of things, no wonder we exclaim, 'surely modern marriage is much mixed!'

Edna Esbourne uttered the last sentences with a bitterness of tone and gesture that were almost dramatic in their effect and thrilling in their intensity. Coming as they did from her of all women, they caused Roger Northbrook no little surprise, and he did not conceal his wonderment at the words she had uttered and her style of delivery, together with the evident familiarity with her subject which she evinced so plainly. Pausing in their walk, he looked intently into her pale face, in which he saw signs of deep emotion and real feeling that pained him deeply. She had undoubtedly experienced some terrible sorrow to make her view the serious side of life with such saddened vision and pity-laden eyes. Laying his hand upon her shoulder lightly, he said gravely, and in deeply sympathetic tones :

"Miss Esbourne, forgive me, but there is a note in your voice to-night that has such a plaintive wail in its tone that it leaves a mournful sound in my ears. I do not ask you to-night to tell me the meaning of that note—at least not till you feel you can, always remembering you have a ready and sympathetic listener—but I know that it could never, never be a part of the symphony of your life, except it was taught you by a past sad and perhaps very bitter experience. Only a woman who has suffered deeply from a great wrong could speak of the wrongs of others as you have spoken to-night ; only one who has known the blight of injustice, the bondage of a discordant union, could surely ever reveal its terrible effects on others' lives. It is futile for me to attempt to discuss this topic with you, I know, for you are such an able exponent of the cause you have evidently suffered for and now so heroically champion. Yet I must say if it has done

nothing else (that is, assuming as I do that you have endured bitter sorrow and disappointment) it has evolved a strong earnest spirit ; has fitted you to deal ably with a subject that has long wanted a woman's voice to champion, and by her sacrifice of herself, ennoble. But," he added, " you must remember that all reforms have their martyrs, and society will not hesitate to demand the sacrifice to-day just as readily as it did of old."

" I do not mind that in the least if I can but do some lasting good," Edna answered, speaking with suppressed emotion in her voice.

" What ! would you be willing to sacrifice your whole future ? Your youth, and social prospects ? " he asked.

" Gladly, if I might be the Teacher of Women, and so enable them to redeem their own lives and be the moral saviours of our men," she answered earnestly, looking up into his face with eyes that he observed were humid.

" That is indeed a high and lofty zeal ; truly a great mission you have chosen ; yet —— "

" Yet, what ? " she questioned, eagerly.

" The world of women will not understand you and the world in general will call you a fanatic," he said slowly, almost reluctantly, for he felt his words would not be pleasant, yet, knowing the nature of the opposition she would have to encounter in such a difficult and unpopular mission, he felt bound, as her accepted friend, to warn her.

" Mr. Northbrook," she returned quietly, " would I be the first who had so suffered for daring to voice their convictions ? I know a Via Dolorosa is the path which every reformer must walk in. It is the path of sacrifice, therefore the way of the Cross. But I willingly take it," she said calmly.

" Ah, but, my dear friend," he replied, taking her hand in his and gazing earnestly into her pale agitated face, filled with a divine enthusiasm that almost awed him, " my friend, there is room in the world for

a thousand such women as yourself, but the pity is they are not forthcoming. Nevertheless, though the world needs you greatly, it will certainly crucify you. It will scoff and deride your ideas, misunderstand your motives, attribute your altruistic teachings to self-interest or a desire for notoriety, and lastly, if not least to an ardent soul like yours, it will malign, defame and abuse you personally when it knows least about you or your efforts. Yes, it will even pick every action, every detail of your life to pieces, and with malevolent and vindictive delight rake up everything it can gather in relation to you from your very cradle, so that it but be evil, for it will never consent to see any good in a reformer or saviour. You must be prepared to have your writings refused, because they are out of the beaten track and presume therein to teach the world 'a better way' to happiness than the one it is pursuing. The world does not want to know any better way; it is content to go on in the old paths: the new would require too much effort on the world's part. And anyone, be he prince or peasant, man or woman, saint or sinner, will get nothing but jeers for their pains if they attempt to interfere with the world's business or alter the world's ways. I warn you that you must be prepared to stand against a whole army of opponents, to risk the venom of adverse critics if you attempt to voice those advanced views or expound your higher ideals, through the medium of voice or pen. Should you not feel able to withstand such a formidable army, then I assure you, dear friend, you will go under, you will be ruthlessly sacrificed as hundreds have been before you. It is dare to succeed, or die! Have you seriously thought of all this before you made up your mind to launch out into the sea of life—or even of literature—with such a cargo of daring new notions as you evidently have on board?"

As Roger ceased speaking, a slow smile stole over his face as he noticed the quick flash that leaped into her expressive eyes and the answer trembled on her lips almost before the last sound had left his.

"I have not thought about the world at all ; not considered it in any way beyond to feel that it needs the help, the light, the wisdom that these great truths reveal. I am prepared to suffer for my opinions willingly, since I know—yes, I am positive—that I am in the right. I know that every reformer is a martyr, and I would not shrink from martyrdom so long as I am privileged to set the match to the pile that will burn away every vestige of the old stale order and reveal to a waiting world—a world that now sits in ignorance of its own greatest need—though it knows it *has* a need—the grand and glorious Kingdom of Love—the New Earth which includes the New Heaven, or spiritual kingdom. They shall, they must see it, if even by the light of the martyr's stake, and that revelation will be gladly made for the sake of what the whole of humanity will gain thereby. The very world that demands the sacrifice will richly benefit by what it rejects. Yes, I know full well that every earnest soul must win its crown of triumph, and that is only by way of the Cross. Well," she sighed, "I have borne a very heavy cross already on my own account ; surely I can bear one for the good of my fellow creatures—my brethren and sisters in our Father's Great Human Family ? "

Edna did not seem to expect an answer to her last remarks, for she quietly withdrew her hand from Roger Northbrook's clasp, and, turning round to see that her horse was following them still, moved on with quickened steps towards home.

A silence of some minutes fell between them ; each appeared wrapt in their own thoughts, and words were not necessary just then. They had scaled another height in their pathway of soul-friendship, and each was conscious of a strong link binding their interests together indissolubly, a link that was stronger even than that known as love—it was a union of Souls.

They had by this time struck the main track back to the homestead, which they could see among the trees in the distance. Presently Roger Northbrook remarked

in ruminating tones, more as though he were voicing aloud his thoughts than actually asking a question :

" If the selection of a husband or wife who is on your own plane of development be such an important factor in the progress of each individual soul, it surely leaves a very limited circle for an intelligent soul seeking a mate, to choose from, since there are comparatively few who are yet awake to the higher consciousness. And even though you might happen to select one whom you thought was your soul's true mate, that one might not be of the same opinion concerning you."

" There would not be the least doubt on that point. Of that I feel certain. If they are in reality the true halves of each other, and both awake to their divinity during the present manifestation, they will know each other, even afar off. As souls they will rush together as the poles would do were the earth removed ; would greet each other and embrace, even though as bodies they stood far apart."

" This would make it as necessary for the woman to seek the man if she recognized him as her soul's partner first, as it is to-day the accepted rule for the man to woo the woman. Man but obeys the dictates of nature within him, and this has ever compelled him to seek his mate for himself. You would not have him wait till she sought him, would you ? " he asked, with a quizzical smile as he glanced at her.

" No, no ; I think you have missed my real meaning there. But I will answer your question now and explain later what I was about to say," responded Edna, with just the slightest shadow in her eyes and pucker on her brow. " I fully recognize that the order of the universe is first the masculine then the feminine ; first the Intellect and then the Intuition ; first the man and then the woman. Thus in the same way as Intellect has to seek for or feels the need of a union with Intuition, in the spiritual nature of man, so is this objectified on the visible plane by the necessity the masculine nature finds for the company of the

feminine. This then makes it a necessity for the stronger to woo the weaker ; the lower to seek or aspire to the higher ; the man, in short, to woo the woman. It is not the woman who feels the need of the man, but the man of the woman. Thus we unconsciously obey the laws of our being, and of the whole universal order, when we conform to the social custom that makes it the right and proper thing for the man to propose, and not the woman as some revolutionists would have it. The only justification for reversing the accepted order of things would be if the lord of creation allowed himself to degenerate to such an extent that he actually became the weaker intellectually. But under present-day conditions I for one do not agree with any such unnatural innovation," she concluded emphatically.

" Your argument does you credit, I am sure, and is also most logical. I am glad to find that you still allow ' the lord of creation ' his rightful place in the universe, even though you do most unflatteringly relegate him to the place of ' the lower who must woo the higher,' " he observed, humorously.

" I have not taken away any of his prerogatives, rather have I given him a greater incentive to woo or aspire to the higher. But he should at least have a clear idea what he is aspiring to. He as the representative of intellect, reason and will, should be able to judge the real merits of that which he is seeking as his mate. He should not be led away by the illusion of his senses or the desires of the heart apart from the guidance of the mind, and thus take anything that offers, that pleases his eyes and charms his fancy. Unfortunately, many men are like children in their wooing, and are attracted as readily by the outside appearances as the child is to its gay toy. The old saying that ' love is blind ' means that so-called love, or infatuation, throws a veil over the eyes of judgment, and leads him about as one who is blind-fold till he is as likely to fall in love with a doll, as was Titania, to see perfection in the ass ' Bottom.' What is the use of

man's vaunted intellect and reasoning powers if he does not use them in the most important event of his life. He has the privilege of choosing from the world of women—why not choose as carefully at least as he will a cigar or a necktie? Is it any wonder that there are so many flaws sought and found in the marriage contracts to-day, when men play with their reason to amuse their senses in the game of love?"

"You speak bitterly of the sex now," observed Roger, "but do you infer in that latter sentence that a marriage to be legal depends entirely upon a certain form or ceremony being *letter perfect*? That the real spirit of the contract counts for nothing, if that is found wanting?"

"I did not say so, though apparently that is the law to-day as related to modern marriage: if there be a flaw in the contract the marriage is no marriage. But *you*, who are more advanced than most men I have met, you do not consider that marriage, *true marriage*, depends alone upon such a frail and unstable fabric?" she questioned, looking up at him with a quick enquiring glance.

"I should hope not," he answered, "or there would be woeful degeneracy in the system upon which our whole social fabric is founded. I take it that the ceremony is but an outward visible form of the inward spiritual union—or should be," he added.

"Yet just think how many so-called marriages there are being contracted to-day where the ceremony of marriage is *but* a ceremony—nothing more. Where the persons who enter into such unions are greater soul-strangers to each other than if they had never met one another in the flesh even? Where the love element of the contract does not survive much longer than the flowers that have adorned the supper tables?"

"In which case, by your own showing, the world is not ready for ideal marriages, and the idea of soul-unions among men and women to-day would be a fallacy," suggested Roger, dryly.

"Yes, unfortunately, your words sound true, if

'to-day' were all. To us it apparently is nothing deeper than the joining of hands, not even of hearts, in some cases; the mere linking of names and lands; acquiring or exchanging titles and pedigrees, or social position, for wealth, possessions or worldly estates. In fact, what is known as a 'brilliant marriage' to-day is nothing else; the very idea of anything deeper, holier or better would certainly be scouted by friends and foes alike. The true union of souls is as rare as a four-leaved shamrock, while the substitute into which marriage has degenerated has become merely a commercial or diplomatic transaction. But this is only 'to-day'—the soul-union is for eternity, and must first be conceived before it can be revealed and so made visible to the race."

"Certainly your remarks are very true, while your ideas regarding the ideal marriage you spoke of earlier and these latter theories are most sublime in conception," responded Roger Northbrook, thoughtfully, "but, Miss Esbourne, have you ever really considered how very impracticable both would appear to the average man, especially the Ideal Union, under existing conditions of society and the present-day idea of marriage and what it means? You know," he continued, "men and women require to be educated up to your special standard before you could ever induce them to understand the altruism involved in the contraction of unions such as those would be. Of course, as you remarked, it would be the salvation of the race, and the making of a new and grander humanity than the world has ever yet seen. The offspring of such unions would be a race of giants—mental giants I mean, of course, and endowed, too, with large spirituality."

"Rather," she corrected, "would they not be Sons of God? For God requireth such pure and perfect ones to worship Him, not by songs and praises of the lips, but by the improvement of their bodies. By building up within themselves clean hearts, pure and righteous souls that shall be living temples of holiness

to the Lord, temples in which His Spirit—the Infinite Life Principle—can dwell in love and harmony eternally. This can only be done by purity of life and thought, and will be fully realized in the world, only when men and women learn the meaning of true marriage to be soul—not body—union,” asserted Edna, earnestly.

“That is a reform that must be gradual, like all other lasting reforms,” returned Roger, “and in the meantime many thousands of human beings must go down under the Juggernaut Wheels of the present imperfect Social System. Besides, how can those who have been joined to unsuitable partners in youth, perhaps by their own mistakes or the misjudgment of parents or guardians, ever get an opportunity to realize this ideal state of matrimony in the highest sense of the term, if they are bound together for life, or until some misdemeanor gives them a right to be released from the uncongenial partner? It is a legal bondage to one or other of the parties instead of being the cause of happiness and peace, and proves a galling yoke. Yet they must bear it, and how can such hope for an ideal union, be they ever so fitted for it?”

“I do not think any human being should be in mental, moral or spiritual bondage, any more than they should be in physical,” asserted Edna. “We have abolished slavery throughout all civilized nations, and yet we insist upon a worse class of slavery—a slavery of mind and morals. I think it is Emerson who says, ‘No love can be bound by oath or covenant to secure it against a higher love.’ And certainly no union can honestly be termed ‘marriage’ in its highest, holiest sense if the divine love of soul for soul is not the root and foundation of it, the rock on which it is built. All other contracts are baseless, they rest in time only and on the shifting sands of social custom. Even if blessed by Church and sanctioned by State, they are merely arrangements made to meet the needs of the flesh and the demands of the world, and, being no more

and no less, should be treated for just what they are—mere contracts of convenience.”

“Why, Miss Esbourne!” exclaimed Roger Northbrook, “you now astonish me more than ever to hear that from you. That would strike a serious blow at our moral laws, and break the commands of God,” he protested.

“I do not hold with such being in accordance with the commands or laws of God in any respect,” she affirmed. “It is my sincere belief that God has no more hand in making such marriages than He is supposed to have in the causes that eventually go towards marring them and so end in the other legal farce—divorce. Moses is said to have allowed the Children of Israel permission to give writings of divorcement to an offending wife, *because* of the hardness of their hearts, not by God’s command, remember, This hardness of heart is just as pronounced among men to-day in our modern civilisation while they continue to seek after the things of the flesh and ignore the spirit of true union, the one thing that endureth and ruleth over and through all, and that maketh a true and lasting, yea, an eternal union. This union alone is the joining together by God’s hands; the partners of such unions alone are they whom God hath joined together and no man can put asunder—nothing keep apart.”

“What, though, if an obstacle in the form of a husband or wife, as the world knows such, interpose between these souls who have recognised each other as their true affinities?” he questioned. “Would they still be justified in rushing to each other and ignoring all other worldly claims?”

“If it so happened that the revelation came to one or both of them during the period they were under the moral law, then they must obey the lower laws to the letter before they can be fitted to be ruled by the higher. They must pay every jot and tittle till the hour of their emancipation comes and they are free. Or, as Jesus said, they must ‘render unto Caesar the

things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.' This means that they must carry out as far as in them lieth all moral obligations to their conjugal partner while it is demanded of them to do so, and that, too, in purity, honesty, fidelity of thought and act, truth and holiness, for this is right in the sight of God. The Soul-Union does not depend upon the personal presence nor the things of time for its satisfaction; it is for eternity, so it can wait."

"What! even for years?—perhaps for a life-time?" he cried, in tones of surprise.

"Yes," said the woman calmly, "even for a life-time or for ages. Once they have recognised each other and have even only signalled to one another 'like ships that pass in the night,' they will go on their different ways rejoicing, but never, never lose the knowledge gained by that one moment of recognition, the knowledge that they have met, that the universe holds them, that once having emerged from the mists of the great unknown they are now and for ever known to each other throughout eternity. The memory will indelibly remain, and they will seek each other through the ages till they finally meet once again, and meeting, know as they to themselves are known—the complement of each, no longer divided. Then, in that sublime moment they will rush together as one individual life, one as they were in the Beginning."

"But what a long, long waiting time perhaps there may be before such bliss can be theirs," he remarked, while he was deeply impressed by her words of mystic wisdom.

"Such bliss is well worth waiting for," she replied gravely. "It is but a moment of time really, in the soul's vast eternity. Bodies become impatient over the withholding from them of their heart's desires, because they know that they are but things of a day—ephemeral, therefore must die. So they snatch their joys recklessly, fearing to lose them altogether but like Dead Sea fruit they soon find them as dust and ashes. But an immortal soul can look at life

otherwise. It sees life steadily and sees it in whole. Then what need for haste or flurry, since eternities are behind it and eternities lie before. A child of the Infinite can wait for its heritage, knowing that *nothing* can keep it away from it, nothing can bar its progress to its final goal, nothing hinder it from at last finding its other half—its true mate—and so complete its circle and return unto its Father's House as it came forth—a perfect whole. This, this is the great mission of the soul; this alone is the Divine Marriage!"

As these burning words fell from the woman's lips Roger Northbrook listened and felt as though they were not spoken by a mortal, for Edna's whole countenance was shining with the light of a divine enthusiasm, a light such as he had never before seen on the face of any human being. He was amazed, and for the moment no words occurred to him as adequate response to such sentiments. A deep silence fell upon them which was suddenly broken by the sound of a horseman trotting behind them, and Mr. Esbourne appeared. As he overtook them he rallied them on their dilatoriness. Then together the three walked on to the homestead.

Thus for that evening the spell was broken!

CHAPTER XIII.

IDOL-BREAKING IN THE REALM OF THOUGHT.

"The law of life is evolution and development and if you are not evolving and developing you are not fulfilling the law of life."
—JAMES A. EDGERTON.

On the way to the house Mr. Esbourne remarked, turning to Mr. Northbrook:

"I am much afraid that the drought is upon us in earnest this summer. Things are in a terrible state out-back."

"I am very sorry to hear that," returned Roger. "Is there any fear of your flocks suffering?"

"Well no, not immediately, but if rain doesn't come shortly we'll have to start feeding next week.

We're feeding the lambs now." Then, turning to Edna, he said, "I met Stevens on my way home, Edna; and just fancy, he tells me that the whole of Raeburn's flock, second to none up their way, are dead of starvation!"

"Oh! Father, how disappointing!" exclaimed Edna, in sympathetic tones, "and we know it took years to make that flock, and now it has all to be started again!"

"That is exceedingly bad news, Mr. Esbourne," said Roger, "a proof, is it not, of a few of the disadvantages of squatting in Australia?"

"Yes, but it is a part of the experience in squatting that a man is seldom given credit for; that is where his indomitable courage in the face of difficulties and disappointments comes in; and his long, long stock of patience," said Mr. Esbourne, grimly.

"Well, these qualities in her sons must have their reward and will surely bring Australia to the front at last, despite her many drawbacks," assented Roger Northbrook.

"It will, it will," affirmed the squatter. "But I also heard that all the way from here to Balranald it is the same story of dead and dying stock. Do you know Mr. Northbrook, that unless anyone has seen the sight they cannot imagine it at all? Stevens told me that a dog he had out with him the other day while in the drought-stricken district chased an emu, and the poor brute fell over from very weakness, through attempting to kick his tormentor. When Stevens rode up and examined it he found it a living skeleton. The very kangaroos and wild turkeys are so quiet that they could ride up within twenty yards of them before they would attempt to move—too weak from hunger. And, by jove! that is a bad state of things when even the wild native things cannot find food. What chance have we, with our great flocks and herds, I should like to know, during a season like the present one?" concluded the squatter.

"The prospects are not encouraging, certainly,"

admitted Roger, "but it only accentuates our conversation of a few weeks back, I think. But if New Zealand has done so much by labor and expenditure to make bush lands into rich pastures, then I should think that with a little forethought and co-operation, the Australian pastoralists might convert their vast holdings into veritable Gardens of Eden, through a water conservation scheme and better methods of irrigation."

"That day is most assuredly coming," assented Mr. Esbourne, "but we know the old saying, about the grass growing and the horse starving? Well, it is something like that at present. When things are prosperous we are busy trying to make up for our losses sustained in the bad season, and have little time to think of the one to come; then when the drought is upon us we are too busy contriving how to keep the stock alive long enough to justify the adoption of means to ensure future supplies;" and Mr. Esbourne laughed cheerily at the apparently hopeless predicament in which his argument had placed the Australian pastoralist, then added: "Well, like everything else that is in the path of progress, one part of the world must die that the other may live. It all is but a survival of the fittest."

"That is evidenced throughout the whole visible universe, from the least to the greatest," observed Roger Northbrook. "It applies in like manner to people, religions, nations and worlds. There is a necessity for sacrifice all along the line, and it is but to bring forth the best. As each is tried and discarded, and effort after effort is put forth, it is palpable to the onlooker that it is ever Nature's one supreme effort to bring forth only the best on all planes of manifestation."

Edna gave him a quick comprehensive glance, but said nothing. Mr. Esbourne asked, jokingly:

"And when will that best be revealed?"

"The absolute best will never be reached, because when the visible highest has been attained, there will

always be a still higher beyond. So that man can always attain the apparently unattainable, yet the unattainable will never be attained, still Man must ever strive and climb."

"Well, that is a paradox, if ever there was one!" exclaimed Mr. Esbourne, laughing loudly. "Come now, Mr. Northbrook, you well know that I'm no match for you in discussions of this sort; I'll always give in to you on that platform. But where it affects the merits or demerits of my country, well, I defy any man to beat me. I'm like the Irishman, 'I'm wedded to me counthry.' You may say what you like about all others, I'll never dispute their merits or demerits, only where they are held up in contrast that is hostile to Australia!" and the squatter chuckled at his own flaring patriotism.

"Why! you are inclined to go one better than the Scotchman for love of country. The Irishman isn't in it where you are concerned, Mr. Esbourne," cried Roger, laughingly, as he accompanied his host indoors. "I sincerely hope that Australia will fully justify your sanguine belief in her future."

"She will, sir, she will! I'll stake my existence on that."

On entering the lounge, Edna sought Gracie and was told of the sudden fainting-fit that had overtaken the Rev. Cyril Clifford on the tennis court. She was much concerned to hear of it, and on enquiring was told that he was still asleep in the library, not having awakened since the doctor had given him a sedative before leaving. They all thought the sleep would do him good. After changing her habit, Edna went in to see how he was. Finding he was sleeping soundly, exhausted by the heat to which he was unaccustomed, Edna stole quietly to the head of his couch, and stood silently looking down on the pale delicate face of the young man, with an expression of tender, womanly sympathy.

Edna had not taken any great interest in the young clergyman since his arrival, for his was not a

personality to attract attention, his character being in a transitional stage and his individuality by no means pronounced. He had not appealed to Edna, and had spent so much of his time with her brothers that she had little opportunity of knowing much about the Rev. Cyril. Amy and Ella absorbed him in the evenings, as he had rather a fine voice and played the violin exceedingly well; thus there was always a crowd around him when in the house, and Edna's days were occupied lately in assisting her mother to entertain their visitors and manage the household generally.

But now, as Edna looked upon that face in repose, she saw there what she took to be an indication of latent power, hidden force. There was strength in the lower portion of the face; in the firm set of the lower jaw, the shape of the mouth; and great determination in the firm well-cut chin. This the upper portion of the young man's face was inclined to contradict, for there lay all his artistic and effeminate tendencies plainly evidenced. But these by training could be toned down and the stronger qualities if wisely developed and mingled harmoniously would in time form a very admirable character. As yet, of course, he was but raw and immature.

Then she found herself wishing that he might know what she had found, and, so knowing, he might be used for the spread of that light to a world at present sitting in darkness and gloom. "He has no real interest in the Church," she thought, "beyond it being his adopted profession, and if he continues to follow it, he will soon sink under the weight of its crippling influences; will become the mere automaton which so many hundreds of his brethren have already done: just slaves to forms and ceremonies, creed and dogma; not living, thinking, independent souls with absolute control over their own minds, with power to think and act according to their God-given powers." Then there flashed into her mind some words she had been reading the previous day: "Our best thoughts are public property, and the world has a claim on them by the

tie that binds all humanity." Yes, we are to stand by it, live for it, and it will bless us, even though the world despises us. "Then if it will bless us, surely it will bless those to whom the thought is passed on if they will but accept it," thought Edna. "Why—why, even though he is a clergyman, should I hesitate to impart to him these great new truths which have been revealed to me? They are not for myself alone, but for all the world—all the great family of the All-Father. He is one of that great family. The fact that he has taken up a calling that binds him to hand down 'the traditions of the elders' does not exempt him from the light if he will but look at it. It is the light which when lighted in our souls we must not put under a bushel."

"No!" she thought, "I will not hold my peace, nor hide the light I carry from him any more than from others. Surely he needs these great redeeming life-truths to help build up his frail body, just as much as he does to enrich his soul. He has been trained to preach and speak to the multitudes. Oh! if he could but grasp the grandeur of the New and Higher Teaching, and give himself and his cultivated talents to its propagation, what a glorious thing it would be! I cannot yet be the medium for this part of the work myself, but if I can win another fitted and trained for it, surely I have already achieved something that shall be unto the glory of the Lord Christ?"

Then a shadow came over her eyes as she remembered what Roger Northbrook had said to her that afternoon: "That every new religion must have its martyrs, every great reform is bought with the blood of sacrifice." Could this young man stand that test? Would he, even if he saw the light as she knew she could reveal it to him, would he have the courage to forsake all and follow it? Would he be able to turn his back upon the flesh-pots of Egypt (the Church and its emoluments) and be fed off the manna in the wilderness (spiritual substance, the bread of Truth and wine of Life)?

She observed the quiet face critically, and the impression she obtained from that silent survey was one of conviction that such was possible ; yes, there was every reason to believe that the spirit of the silent yet heroic martyr, the fighter for a cause he thought worthy his zeal, lay hidden beneath that soft and gentle exterior. As yet he was spiritually asleep, and knew not his own potential powers ; had never suspected his own soul-strength. There had been nothing in the course of training through which he had passed in preparation for the Church to draw forth these powers. But, well—Edna Esbourne was resolved that she would endeavor to awaken them, and so illumine his mind with the Light of Truth that he would be put to the test. The opportunity to do this came, as it happened, sooner than she anticipated.

A few days later, when the heat indoors had been almost unbearable throughout the day, towards the cool of the evening Edna wheeled Gracie's couch out upon the lawn, under a large Moreton Bay fig tree, where they frequently had afternoon tea. To-day Grace seemed weary and rather exhausted, and was disinclined to talk, so Edna brought one of their favorite books and was reading to the young girl when the Rev. Cyril Clifford joined them, and with languid air dropped into a large easy chair near, saying :

" Shall I be interrupting you if I remain, Miss Esbourne ? This heat is terrible ! "

" Yes, you will be sure to feel it, coming as you have from England at this time of the year. But after a time you will get accustomed to it," remarked Edna.

" You were reading, I noticed. Pray do not let me interrupt you. May I stay and listen ? " asked the Rev. Cyril.

" By all means do, I shall be most pleased," replied Edna. " Though," she added with a faint smile, " perhaps you will not like the class of literature we are studying."

" What is it ? " he inquired.

" It is a book by one of the writers on the New

Thought," she answered. "But perhaps you have not even heard of it, Mr. Clifford?"

"No, I cannot say that I have till the other day, but I must confess that I accidentally overheard some remarks you were addressing to Miss Gracie, and if the book you are now reading is the same class of thought, I hope you will excuse me saying so, but it sounded to me most unorthodox," and as he finished speaking the young clergyman smiled rather indulgently, then added: "But, of course, I did not hear enough to judge correctly, as it may only have been an extract you were quoting," he ventured.

A slow quiet smile wreathed Edna's lips as she met the eyes of Cyril Clifford, then answered in her calm even tones:

"Well, Mr. Clifford, you must judge for yourself now, and although you may not agree with the statements made you may perhaps be open to conviction if they appeal to your reason. I will continue where I was when you joined us:

"The Spirit of demand is a Divine Law. It acts on all created things, to make them finer and better. It has brought this planet and all things on it from the chaos and crudity of countless ages past, up to its present degree of refinement. It cannot be checked. When you would force it back it returns with more power and in a different form. A great silent demand is to-day going out from millions of hearts. Those hearts are silently saying, 'Our religion does not satisfy us. It does not heal the sick; it does not give us sound bodies; it gives us nothing tangible concerning a future existence; it makes no new revelations. No signs and wonders accompany the preaching of the word. Our friends go one by one. The grave closes over them and when we ask of them, we get in reply only the stereotyped generalities.'

"This great silent demand of thousands is going out night and day. It is a mighty unseen force, working, acting and bringing results whether those who make such demands keep it always in mind or not

Forgetfulness for a time of the thing demanded does not lessen the working power of the demand to draw to us the thing demanded. This demand is in many who would not dare to tell it even to themselves. We often try to beat back thoughts and longings which come to us. But they do come again and again. They will not be beaten back. They are imperative forces waiting and knocking for admittance. They may so come for years before they are expressed in words to others. Perhaps our first verbal recognition of them is when we hear them talked over or written out by another, and then we say in surprise, 'Why, I have been thinking these same thoughts for years !' "

Edna paused and laid the book upon her knee, then, lifting her eyes, saw that those of Cyril Clifford were fixed intently upon her face with a deeply puzzled expression. Observing that Edna had finished the paragraph, he said :

"Excuse me for saying so, Miss Esbourne, but that book savors of rank heresy."

"Yes, I know it will sound so to your ears, Mr. Clifford," replied Edna, calmly.

"And to the ears of anyone else except the writer, whoever he may be," he asserted hotly. "Our religion does not satisfy us?" he quoted scornfully. "Well then, will that very clever New Thought writer be good enough to tell us what religion will?"

"Yes, Mr. Clifford, he can and does, and others also, even more clearly. But without any further reference to them I think I can answer you myself," said Edna, looking steadily into the white face of the delicate young parson, which just then seemed to be a tangible proof of the statements she had just read.

"It does not heal the sick, it does not give us sound bodies;" no, not even to its chosen vicars and ordained preachers. They surely are more subject to the ills of the flesh than even their flocks. They more frequently require a holiday to recuperate their lost vitality, which the very practice of that religion which they preach should at least ensure them in reward for

their faith—if faith they really have in it. At any rate, the Rev. Cyril Clifford was not a very creditable monument of the promise given by the Master, when he assured his disciples that they would go forth in his Name and that “the blind should see, the sick should be healed, the dead would be raised, and to the poor would the gospel be preached.” This was another case of “physician, heal thyself” before he could heal others in body or mind, let alone soul or spirit.

“What is the religion that will do these impossibilities, if the religion of Jesus Christ will not?” he asked tentatively.

“The religion of TRUTH, which alone is the religion—or teaching—of Jesus Christ. The truth which he voiced when he taught that the One Life which he named ‘The Father’ permeated every atom of this visible as well as the invisible universe. That we as souls are the highest manifestation of the One Life, and inherit all the glorious attributes of our infinite source; that we are one with the Father as he was One. That as the Father is all life, light, wisdom, power, truth and love, we have these as our inheritance, to use as we will.”

“Well, there is nothing startlingly new in that,” interrupted the Rev. Cyril. “What else does this religion of Truth teach different to what I know as the religion of Jesus Christ?”

“It teaches,” continued Edna in the same calm voice and manner, “that God dwells not in a distant or far away heaven above the clouds, seated on a throne of light, but that the dwelling place of the Most High is within our own souls—right in the holy of holies of our beings—and the throne of light, the great white throne, is our spiritual consciousness. It is the Heaven which God created, and our sense-consciousness, or body, is the earth, which he also created. We are rulers in our own kingdom, and the ruling power is Thought. Intellect is the greater light which rules the day; Intuition, the lesser light that rules the night—or times of doubt and darkness

within our souls. This is termed the 'light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world.'

"The firmament is our understanding. That is the rock on which the Church of Christ must be built. This rock Jesus likened Peter to, because Peter Jonas—or Janus—means the door by which all knowledge enters the mind of man. This door is the human understanding, for until we thoroughly understand a thing how can we really know it? We must see before we can perceive, and we must also perceive before we can understand; and then understanding must come before realization is possible.

"Can you, Mr. Clifford, although a clergyman, honestly say that you understand the mysteries and miracles of the gospel story as the Church teaches them? Can you explain for yourself and to your entire satisfaction all the statements which the story contains?" questioned Edna.

"It is not our place to question it, Miss Esbourne," he replied sternly. "We are to believe it because it is God's word."

"Then if we are to believe what we cannot understand, what are our reasoning powers given us for? It cannot be belief, unless we understand what we are believing," contended Edna.

"We walk by faith, not by sight; and the time will come when all these things will be revealed to us clearly and we shall be satisfied. In the meantime we must believe that the inspired word of God speaks the truth of these Bible stories. And if we believe the Bible to be true and the holy word of God, we must accept what it says unquestioningly," argued the young clergyman.

"The time is *now* or whenever the mind becomes sufficiently enlightened to receive the revelations, that these things are made plain to us. And 'whosoever heareth may come and take of this water of life NOW,'" replied Edna. "Then as to the Bible being the *only* word of God, that I cannot and do not believe. God's word can never be contained within the covers

of any written book or books, be they ever so inspired. God's word is a living word. The Bible was God's spoken word to His prophets and teachers in the days of old, but God speaks to-day as plainly to man if he will but listen, as He did then to those inspired recorders of His words. His word is vitalized with the life of all life, and that word is what is now made flesh and dwells among us—dwells in you and in me—yes, just as it did in our elder brother and great exemplar, Jesus Christ. His Father is our Father, else why did he say so and teach us to say, 'Our Father which art in Heaven'? Heaven is divine consciousness in each and every soul, and all must come to that state, such as Jesus manifested in his life, before they shall taste of Heaven. Every Soul that says I AM is the living word of God. And as you and I and all who can realize this great Truth can say I AM, we speak the word, and therefore know that the Infinite Life Principle, or God, liveth, abideth and hath His perfected being in us, His well-beloved son."

As Edna had been speaking she could not fail to observe the shocked expression which came over Cyril Clifford's face as he listened to her daring words.

"You say you do not believe the Bible to be God's Word or the only word of God! That is to say the least, blasphemous ——" began the young clergyman, hotly. But, lifting her hand, Edna interrupted him by saying:

"Excuse me, Mr. Clifford, but before we go into these questions any further, I would remind you that much I am likely to say will be on these or similar lines and savor of what you, from an ecclesiastical point of view, will call 'blasphemous heresy.' Now please let me say, in deference to your feelings, that if you would prefer not to continue this debate, or that you do not feel certain you can answer many of my arguments from your own understanding and conviction regarding their truth, then please do not hesitate to say so, and I will refrain from ever bringing up the subject in

your presence again, and in the meantime we can go on with our reading."

"Not at all! by no means! I would much prefer that we should discuss it; in fact, I am eager to do so, as I may be able to show you the way out of some of your errors." Then as he caught sight of a slight smile flitting across Edna's countenance, which disconcerted him not a little, he added in a tone not quite so authoritative, "at least as a curate of the church, it is my duty to try and do so."

"Ah! that is better put, Mr. Clifford," returned Edna, the smile now taking possession of her face and lingering in her dark eyes as they rested kindly upon the young man. "It is difficult to tempt anyone to eat food that they have already tried and found unpalatable and unsatisfying, I think? However, you are willing to cross swords with me, and I am glad, since I feel confident, if I do not exactly win in the contest, I shall at least have given you something wherewith to test your mental and spiritual strength, and that will be something gained. I warn you, though, that if you let me once attack you, I shall not be content to let you alone ever after. There will always be a danger of my returning to the charge till I am certain I am victor and have won my crown by winning a strong soul to a strong—yes, a glorious—cause: the cause of TRUTH!" she asserted boldly.

"Look out, now, Mr. Clifford!" cried Gracie, laughing. "You are in for a severe time, I can tell you, once you get Edna as an opponent on these subjects."

"I hope I shall be able to withstand all her fiery darts," he responded, "but if I find I am in any difficulty I shall call on you for assistance."

"I am a sworn ally of the other side and could never consent to desert the colors. I'm afraid you'll have to rely upon your own prowess to win," said Gracie, with a mischievous sparkle in her big blue eyes as she looked across at Cyril Clifford.

"Well, then, alone I'll stand to face the foe, Miss Gracie." Then turning to Edna, he said more gravely,

" May I ask you, Miss Esbourne, if you have always held these very pronounced views on religious subjects ? If not, what has caused you to adopt them, for you must of course know how unorthodox and heretical they are, and from my point of view also unsound."

" Yes, unorthodox I know they are, but unsound —never ! " said Edna. " But as regards your question if I always held them. No, I did not always think about spiritual things in an unorthodox way. On the contrary I was most strictly religious in my girlhood. But then, like yourself for instance, I did not attempt to question at all ; I let others do my thinking for me on matters of religion, and, like a good child, just accepted what they told me and asked no questions for conscience's sake. But a day came when I wanted consolation, and as this book says, my religion was unsatisfying. Then I began to question much that I had previously taken for granted ; and my questioning brought me face to face with some very vast truths. And at last, where once all had been darkness, now all is light in my soul."

" How can you have light if you are a heretic to the Christian religion and so out of the Church of Christ ? " questioned Cyril Clifford.

" I am more than ever a follower of the true Christian religion and the teachings of Christ whose Church we are when we learn to do His will, ' for if ye will do His will ye shall know of the doctrine.' His will is truth. Truth gives us light ; wisdom is light, God is both. When we have these we have conscious oneness with God," asserted Edna.

" The mortal or natural man cannot have oneness with God. Only Christ is God. Man can only know God through believing in His atonement," contended the young clergyman.

" True, Christ is God *only*, as you say," admitted Edna, " but have you ever asked yourself what God is ? Who God is ? "

" Why, of course, I know God is the Supreme

Being, the Creator of heaven and earth," answered Cyril Clifford, with a look of surprise at her question.

"But have you any idea who and what that Supreme Being is? where He is? what He is to you and me—to all His creation?" asked Edna, quietly.

"It is a new experience to be catechised thus," laughed the Rev. Cyril, shortly, "but the Supreme Being is the King of all the Universe, and His dwelling place is in heaven. His relation to us is that of a king to his subjects; a father to his children, when we become reconciled to Him through belief in His Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ."

"That is the answer I expected from you, Mr. Clifford," said Edna. "Now are you willing to listen quietly and without interrupting me till I have finished, if I attempt to tell you how I understand the meaning of the word 'GOD'?" she asked.

"Yes, certainly, I am," he assented, "only, supposing I cannot agree with any of your statements I must object."

"Yes, certainly, you shall have every opportunity of so doing. When I am finished I am willing and ready to be catechised freely by you; but so as not to prolong the subject, as interrupting would be certain to do, you must allow me to unfold my ideas before you first and then discuss them afterwards. I do not like my train of thought broken if I can help it, as I feel it all unwind from within, and interrupted thoughts, like broken threads in tapestry, are apt to mar the pattern." She smiled as she added, "Are you now agreeable to listen quietly, Mr. Clifford?"

"Yes, I promise I will not interrupt unless you ask me a question, Miss Esbourne," affirmed the young man.

"Thank you so much; that will make it far easier for me to talk to you," said Edna. "Now, first, before we begin to discuss God's dwelling place or God's Son, let us thoroughly understand if possible who and what God is in Himself. You admit that God is Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent, do you not?"

"Most assuredly. The Bible teaches that," acquiesced Cyril.

"Then," continued Edna, "if God be in reality all these, He is manifestly all-inclusive and there can be nothing in the whole universe but God. He is infinite and eternal, and if there be nothing but omnipresent life, and that life is God, where is there room for anything that is not life, love, truth, wisdom—and all these are what we term GOD ?

"This is what is known as the first cause, the Spiritual Essence of the Universe. The All within the All, and it is what Jesus termed God—SPIRIT (not *a Spirit*). This is what was from the beginning, and permeates every atom of space, fills all space. There is not one particle of the vast universe that is not vitalized by that spiritual essence.

"If you admit that God is spirit and omnipresent spirit, you must recognise that there is no place where It is not. So that that which mankind has termed God is in reality the one invisible eternal, universal Life Principle which creates and sustains every particle in that universe from the tiniest atom to the largest planet. It is also the infinite mind that thinks through its highest creation, MAN ; and acts by means of all Its creations. As the one infinite intelligence It is that Power which upholds and supports everything in creation, from the guidance of suns and planets in their orbits to the directing of the mightiest mind of man, or the instinctive desire of the smallest insect that has life. It is that Wisdom which is the source of all wisdom, the supply of all knowledge.

"It is that which has evolved itself from and through the first fire essence which formed the nucleus of the universe, up, up through uncountable ages of time : forcing itself upwards through the mineral kingdoms of inert matter ; through the dreaming life of the plant in the vegetable kingdom ; onwards through the active life of the animal, till the human being in its earliest crude form appeared, and eventually awakened from the sleep of ages to stand revealed to

Itself as a thinking conscious being—a being possessing the creative power of thought within itself ; not from an exterior source, not from an external creator, but a conscious being which *knew that it knew*—just that which says I AM !

“ This Conscious Being is Generic Man, holding within himself the essence of all that has gone before it ; all the best of the various kingdoms of matter through which it had passed and from which it had evolved. It was therefore the sum of the universe, the crown of creation ; for it held within itself the vital essence of the one eternal life principle. It is this conscious being that is referred to in the first chapter of Genesis as MAN.

“ Man then is the highest expression of God, made in His image ; but man was not thus the highest manifestation, for this conscious being has to bring forth the likeness hidden within Himself. This spiritual creation contains within Itself all the attributes that go to make up the essence of the One Life ; *this* it is which the Bible terms ‘ the Lord God.’

“ This Spiritual Being then is the pure essence of the perfect Spirit and is that which was created ‘ in the beginning,’ male and female, and united as one Soul in essence ; for the Infinite Life Principle is male-female, Father-Mother God. Both natures are contained in it and Man as Its spiritual expression is its perfect Image. This Spiritual Being is that which is termed the Lord God in the second chapter of Genesis, or what is in reality ‘ The Heavenly Father ’ referred to by Jesus. He is the perfect idea of Infinite Mind, and so contains within Himself ALL there is of the best in creation, and this when fully revealed is called *The Christ*.

“ He is the Word expressed—or the Son of God. He is that which is the Power to think, the spiritual consciousness in every human soul. And so this Conscious Being must also express His idea—Mankind, (which is a kind after the idea of Man, or the Lord God)—and is called ‘ Adam ’ in the Genesis allegory.

This kind after the idea of man is made by the Power of Thought, which is the pro-creative power.

“Now this expression of the Lord God is not so perfect as is the creation of God—or First Primal Cause, Infinite Mind—therefore in the second chapter of Genesis it is said to be *the fall of man*. That is, it was a falling away from the perfection of idea which had been originally expressed through it. In expression, then, it was not an Immaculate Conception. But it is in its divine essence still unalterably perfect, and can never in reality fall from that high spiritual state. It is only the imperfect expression of the perfect idea,—mankind, that falls short of the primal perfection, the one essence of All, that which is the One Life or First Cause, or what we call—God!

“This infinite intelligence is now using its various creations through which to manifest itself till each and all bring forth its perfect idea, or immaculate conception of the Godhead, enfolded within the highest, and that highest is Man—the perfect expression of God. The idea of infinite mind is enfolded within the mind of man, just as the gold is enfolded within the quartz, but it has to be unfolded before it can be revealed. This Infinite Intelligence is for ever thinking, working and expressing itself through man, its only medium for complete manifestation, thus revealing the meaning of what is termed the All in the All. It is the All of the God-Essence, and mankind is the All which it permeates.

“This God-power then has evolved, and is still evolving, everything we have, as the result of our use of that pro-creative power—Thought—which was bestowed upon us from the beginning, and revealed in us as intellect united with intuition, the masculine and feminine natures combined—or joined together—as Genesis puts it. Through it we have civilization; we have all that social progress means for us as a race. We have all the arts and sciences, literatures and discoveries of modern days; and it is still this infinite

mind thinking through man—its highest vehicle or channel—as wisdom, truth and love that has brought us to our present degree of development, and will still continue to carry us on to heights and glories inconceivable.

“Man, then, is ‘The Word made Flesh’ and dwelling among us or within us. It was ‘in the bosom of the Father’ or was contained in the First Cause the one Life Principle from the ‘beginning’ and with It has travelled down the ages through all the kingdoms of matter till Spirit expressed Itself as conscious being, and this intelligent conscious being is everlastingly ‘The Word’—that which says I AM. This is the Son of God.

“When by growth Man became perfect as a manifestation of pure Spirit he was called ‘Jesus Christ,’ and so could truthfully say, for Himself and all mankind, *when they arrive at that stage of growth*, in which he was revealed as ‘the first-fruits of them that slept’—‘I and my Father are One’—one and the same, for He manifested All that was contained in the Father (or the Lord God) who was the image, as He, the Perfected Man, is the likeness of God. Then He could also say for Himself and all mankind that ‘before the world was I AM,’ because the Father-Mother God—the one life—is in the masculine-feminine Man—the Son. This Son is the most perfect expression possible up to that degree of growth of the One Life made manifest in the flesh. So spirit once invisible but potential has now become visible through its perfect expression, the Christ-Man, who is always God incarnate and therefore the temple of the living God in very truth, for nowhere else can the Creator dwell consciously but in its perfect creation, Man!

“God then is not a magnified man, nor anything in the form of a man, except as He is expressed *by* Mankind through conscious perfection such as the Christ reveals. So that God, or infinite life, love, wisdom, is just exactly what Man, its perfect expression,

will make of Him to or for himself by the creative power of Thought which infinite mind has entrusted to him. To some the one life will be omnipresent Good, to others it will appear as universal evil. But the one life, the one power, is the same. It never changes. The only difference is in the manner in which it is expressed or appropriated by the user. It is the 'Tree of Life in the midst of the Garden,' whose fruit is good and evil. Man can eat of it how he will, the Tree is the same, the results various.

"The thought now is entrusted to the mind of the thinker. The first cause has brought forth its effect—Man. Thus it is said that 'on the seventh day God rested.' That is, the Infinite Mind having produced or expressed Its perfect idea by the *Word* now hands the government over to the Son, on whom It has bestowed 'Its eternal power and God-head,' and then bids him bring forth the likeness contained in the image, and that image is not the shape called 'Adam,' but the perfect Spiritual Man, called the 'Lord God.' This image contains *all* of the one life and that all includes the '*us*' who is spoken of in the first chapter of Genesis, and means all the spiritual powers of the creator: the Elohim, or seven spirits of the Godhead—love, wisdom, justice, righteousness, understanding, counsel and Divine Awfulness. All these are contained in the Nature of God and fully and freely bestowed upon Man, who when he attains to 'the stature of Jesus Christ' is ever and always 'God's Only Begotten Son.' "

Edna Esbourne here ceased speaking. So great had been her absorption in her subject, and so carried away had she been by the consecutive unfolding of these great thoughts as they thronged through her brain, that she had not noticed that her audience had increased; not till she looked up and with conscious vision beheld Roger Northbrook standing just behind her chair. His eyes were bent upon her and he had evidently been listening most critically to every sentence that fell from the woman's lips.

The Rev. Cyril Clifford had also listened with wonder and evident astonishment at her strange doctrines, though he but partly understood what she had been stating so deliberately and in even measured tones, as though she were describing something she was seeing with her further vision. Gwendoline Godfrey was lounging in her usual graceful attitude, languidly wondering how Edna could think out, let alone talk so lengthily and well, upon such hard deep subjects. To her they were most uninteresting, yet she obeyed the signal which Mr. Northbrook made to her, as together they approached the spot, requesting her to keep silence. He could hear what Edna was saying as they drew near, and knew that if they interrupted her train of thought she might not resume the subject.

Already this man was beginning to understand the peculiarities of the woman beside him; to know the distinctive trend of her mind with the nicety of discernment that displayed the practised student of human nature and showed more than ordinary interest in this particular case.

"Have you been long here?" she asked, looking up and meeting Roger's eyes with a smile of welcome. "I am afraid I have been holding forth rather strongly, and you know when the spirit moves me I am apt to forget everything; time then to me is not."

Then turning to where Cyril Clifford sat, still silent, she added, "I hope you will pardon me if I have held the platform longer than the prescribed limit, but I get carried away when I speak or write on these subjects, they overflow me. I do hope though that I have managed to make myself intelligible. To me it is all so clear, but I may have said it in a multitude of words and that means confusion. Now please make me answer any questions that I have not made clear to your mind—that is, presuming you desire to know more on the subject," she added.

"Thank you, Miss Esbourne," he replied quietly, "but there was really so much in what you said that I think it would take quite a long time to ask all the

questions which arise in my mind. You have made some very daring statements, I must confess, together with a number of startling revelations of a class that shows me there is quite another interpretation to Bible history, offered and accepted in the world to-day, other than the one given under the authority of the Church. I must honestly admit that I have never studied any but the orthodox rendering of Genesis, or, in fact, of any other portions of Scripture. What you have just been saying opens up an entirely new field of thought to me which I do not for a moment admit I agree with ; but until I understand more about it I shall not attempt to disagree nor yet argue upon it."

"A most sound common-sense view to adopt towards it, and one that does you credit, Mr. Clifford," interjected Roger Northbrook. "From what I have heard of Miss Esbourne's discourse I think she has a wonderfully clear grasp of this rather abstruse question of God and creation, or God's relation to man."

"Then am I to conclude that you too, sir, are of the same way of thinking as Miss Esbourne on these matters of religion?" enquired Cyril.

"I am," asserted Roger, quietly.

"Why, it appears, then, that this country is as likely to be steeped in heresy as America is reported to be," exclaimed the young clergyman, in surprised tones. He thought Edna Esbourne was a crank on religion, and really did not consider it worth while to argue the matter out with her—a woman ; but if Mr. Northbrook, a man of the world and one who had made a mark in the world of letters, was also an apostle of such strange heretical doctrines, where might it not end ? He had not the slightest fear as to the solidity of the Church he represented and the doctrines she taught, but if it was at all likely that he should have to encounter many others after the same way of thinking as these two admittedly were, then it would make his duties as a clergyman far less easy or pleasant. He disliked any great mental effort, and this New Thought evidently required a vast amount.

"What is the name of this teaching? It sounds like what I have heard described as Pantheism. I think you named it New Thought, did you not, Miss Esbourne?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Roger Northbrook, speaking for her, "that is its popular name, though it is in reality the oldest thought in the universe, which was laid in the dust of ages, till Jesus of Nazareth unearthed it and found it revealed in himself, and then gave it forth to the world in his teachings. He was the greatest of metaphysicians, and taught the truths of the power of thought in his wonderful sermon on the Mount. His own interpretation of God, as the One Father, the All in All, is just as I have heard Miss Esbourne so ably expound it now. The only difference between that and what has been handed down to us ecclesiastically during the latter centuries is just the difference between the pearl and the shell. The Church lost the pearl of great price and so has been offering us the shell. Now that we have found the pearl for ourselves and know its value, we shall never again be satisfied to accept the shell. Is not that the case Miss Esbourne?" asked Roger, turning to Edna.

"Yes, you have stated it most accurately and artistically I think," she replied. "Had the doctors of theology and teachers of latter days thoroughly understood the God they profess to worship they would never have propagated such glaring contradictions as are revealed to understanding minds to-day," she said.

"Yet they also served a good purpose, for they gave us an accurate foundation on which to build our own structure and also an incentive to search out and find truth for ourselves," returned Roger, smiling down at her. "Truth must be universal and forever identical if it be truth."

"And what is truth? Like Pilate, I also would know this truth?" interposed Cyril Clifford, with a rather quizzical expression in his eyes as he sat with his fingers locked and his chin leaning on them, while

his elbows rested on the arms of his chair, watching Edna Esbourne's face from under his eyebrows, though he addressed Mr. Northbrook.

"Ah! a much vexed question, and one that the world has been asking for ages now, and I much doubt if it has yet received as satisfactory an answer as could be given to it. However, if I were asked to give my definition of truth, I understand it to be what one of the latter day thinkers has described it as 'The correspondence of the conception with the perception; of the subject with the object; of the idea with the reality. That is, it is the demonstration to our consciousness that whatever is represented to the mind as a subjective state finds its exact counterpart in the objective world; that subjective and objective perceptions are both mental abstractions; that such abstractions must be coincident, the subject finding its exact realization in the objective, that truth may be demonstrated. Truth is therefore the realization of the universe.'

"Now I think that a very fine definition, and one that enables us to do as the Bible commands: 'Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good—or God.' Therefore when we have an idea upon any subject regarding the mysteries of life, if we can find its counterpart in nature, or can prove it by referring to the objectified universe, we may know that what we have conceived subjectively is right or good; it is truth. This, once found, we are to hold fast, because it is in harmony with good, which is God; God, Man, and Nature, all being in fact one; we cannot go far wrong in proving our life's problems if we work them out on that plan and in accordance with principle, for principle will always give us Truth!"

"Oh! thank you so much, so very much, for that splendid definition, Mr. Northbrook!" exclaimed Edna delightedly. "I have had my own conception of what we know as Truth, but nothing to equal that, nothing so comprehensive, so grand!"

"From your argument then I take it that you

consider there can be many and various conceptions of truth? It is not probable that, if tested according to Mr. Northbrook's definition of it, all would arrive at the same conclusion at the same time and by the same methods?" observed Cyril Clifford.

"No, nor would they," cried Edna. "For instance, take all the trees in our garden as an example. Not all have arrived at the same altitude. It is in accordance with their degree of growth that their point of view is altered. Yet that does not alter the fact that the earth is so many miles distant from the sun. That fact never changes, though the growth of the tree may alter the distance by a few inches each month or year. So with the principle of the universe; it is unchanging, only our point of view alters as we grow in wisdom and knowledge of these things."

"Then all might easily be right, if your arguments are correct," contended Cyril. "Who then is wrong?"

"Well, it is very much like the principle of mathematics, to my mind," interposed Roger. "I may say that 3 and 3 make 6; you may state 4 and 2 are 6; Miss Godfrey may insist that 5 and 1 comprise the numeral 6. Now then, are not every one of us perfectly correct in our statements as to the requisite numbers to make six? But note that we are only wrong when one of us asserts that our number is the only one which is correct. That then is the person who is wrong. So with the truth. When any one of us affirms that we have the truth, the whole truth, and that everyone else's view of truth is perverted, that one alone is in error. Truth being eternal and immutable, absolute and unchanging, like the principles of mathematics I have just quoted, awaits demonstration, and can only be demonstrated by the will of the thinker, or looker-on, being brought into conjunction or harmony with the law of principle."

"Yes," added Edna, "and this is what the Church requires to grasp and act up to in principle, for, by so doing, it would banish all these factions and dissensions that are doing more to pull down the

pillars of the so-called Christian religion as taught by the churches to-day than anything else outside of it can ever effect. It is the very discord within that creates a demand for something without, and the demand has most certainly brought the supply in this New Thought Movement, which ensures independence of thought to every individual soul. This goes far towards future progress for the whole race."

"There is one thing about this so-called New Thought, as far as I have grasped the meaning of it this afternoon, Miss Esbourne," observed Mr. Clifford, tentatively, "and that is it seems to do away with God altogether, and substitutes in His place something intangible, which you term Principle, First Cause, or Universal Mind. Now, among all these great Primal Deities, where is the God our fathers have worshipped? Can you explain that to me, Miss Esbourne?"

"I will try," replied Edna, calmly returning his challenging glance, which seemed to say "Now I've cornered you."

"First," she continued, "I would remind you that the word GOD as used to-day is most misleading and unscientific, both as applied to the Deity of religionists and of the Universe. It does not express what the Higher Thought teaches of the Infinite Life Principle. The old idea of God was born in the mind of an infant race, who because of their ignorance could not conceive of the Supreme Principle of Life being anything greater than a magnified Man. They made God after their own image; and just as you can frighten a child with a 'bogie-man,' so did the infant race imagine the existence of an awful Being in some distant world, who never actually existed any more than the 'bogie-man,' except in their own imagination.

"Then you must admit that no man can conceive of a God greater than his own mind, for even if there were anything beyond it greater, it would be inconceivable and consequently useless, just like water poured into an already full glass. Therefore, we have for many centuries been worshipping idols. That is,

having each conceived an idea of God for ourselves, we have accordingly worshipped that idea. Though we thought we were all worshipping the one God, 'the maker of heaven and earth,' we have in reality been bowing ourselves down to many gods, since in our minds we have each created an idea of the Supreme Being, and given our individual adoration thereto."

"But if we worship God as Jesus taught us to do, we must worship only one God!" interrupted Cyril.

"Yes, if we worship Him as Jesus Christ taught us to do, we will worship Him within our own souls, not put Him apart imprisoned as it were in a distant heaven. He is 'closer to us than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet.' You know that as no two minds are exactly alike and no two natures altogether similar, so each idea of God must be in accordance with the ideas possible to the mind that conceived it, therefore different. Now, among so many so-called gods, I cannot find the 'One God and Father of all,' as Jesus of Nazareth taught us to know Him. No, Mr. Clifford," concluded Edna emphatically, "I have not taken away your God, I have but broken down one of the idols, and that is a conception which you had of God, and which if I asked you, and all here to describe or draw upon a black board, you would find far different even to your own ideal of what constitutes Deity. God must dwell in His creation, Man, and fully realize His perfect idea of Himself; otherwise no true relations could ever be established between God, Man and the Universe. God the ALL is revealed in MAN the ALL, for ever and for ever."

"One more question, please, Miss Esbourne," said Cyril, as Edna rose from her chair to proceed indoors, but she now paused and, resting her hand on the head of Gracie's couch, stood waiting for the next question from the young curate. "Where, can you tell me, does this Deity dwell—this God whom as Infinite Life, you offer me instead of the God I have always known?" and the young man looked gravely and earnestly into

Edna Esbourne's pale thoughtful face with anxious enquiring gaze.

"Ah! then I have not yet been sufficiently explicit, surely? Where else could He dwell but in 'the Kingdom of Heaven' which Jesus told us was 'within us.' Where then is the King but in His Kingdom? Truly a kingdom could not be more nigh? It is in the temple of our souls, our inner being, which is the true holy of holies, where the Omnipresent One has His secret dwelling place. Were it not so, how could He know our every joy and sorrow, our every struggle and temptation; how care for all our needs and supply them, too, were He not part of us and we of Him? How feel our every heart-ache and know our most secret thoughts were He not enfolded in our very lives as the power of thought, the breath of life, the heart-throb of our being, the great love-centre of all humanity?

"He is God in the bush, and the bush is not consumed, for God, the One Life, is in the bush—humanity; and the creatures who hold that one life, or fire within themselves, are not consumed or destroyed, when they do all things according to the higher laws of their being, as did His servant Moses. Then 'take thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place thou standest upon is holy ground.'

"Shoes are error thoughts, sense ideas regarding our own God-being. We must take these from off our feet—that is our mortal or animal mind which naturally walks on all fours. It does not yet stand upright in the consciousness of its own divinity, nor fly as a bird on spiritual wings to the heights of its own selfhood which is its divine consciousness of sonship with the Almighty. It does not take the wings of the morning of a new birth and soar to the world of new thought, or 'holy ground,' which is a new spiritual consciousness as to who God is and who *It* is in its real being.

"This is always an undiscovered country to the soul. It is the promised land which the children of Israel (who as a nation symbolise the soul of man) are

seeking ; but we, like they, wander long years in the wilderness of sense before we reach our blessed country, though it is waiting close at hand all the time.

“ That kingdom of heaven, of power and dominion lies within ourselves, and it is there where the soul meets its Lord, or ‘ Melchizedek, King of Righteousness and Prince of Peace,’ face to face in that inner sanctuary of its being and the place is indeed ‘ holy ground ’ to it. Those who would enter this sanctuary must leave all old sense ideas and error thoughts outside. Take off such shoes as ignorance, anger, spite, passion, jealousy, idolatry, or misconception of the one and only true God, letting the mind and heart be purified and naked—bare as feet without shoes—in the presence of your higher and diviner self, the Lord ; putting on the perfect idea or God’s immaculate conception of your own God-being which is ever and always ‘ the mind of Christ,’ enter into your kingdom of heaven, where the Father-God dwells eternally seated on the throne of light and everlasting life, equally amid all beings. A King indeed in the only kingdom where such a King can dwell, ‘ the House not made with hands, eternal in the heavens of spirit,’ our spiritual bodies where consciousness is centred.

“ Then we shall indeed know that the place is holy ground and that holiness—or wholeness—fills us. We shall see God face to face revealed in our own flesh, where He shall be visible to all who have eyes to see ; and our eyes shall behold the King in His beauty. We shall know that it is He who abides for ever with us, the same yesterday, to-day and forever. That because *we are*, *He is* in us, and it is Himself in us that says, ‘ I AM THAT I AM!’ ”

As these closing words fell from Edna Esbourne’s lips she moved quietly away and left the group. Then there was a silence for some minutes that not one of the others felt disposed to be the first to break.

It was as though the very presence which the woman had been so beautifully describing had been consciously among them. The atmosphere was so

elevated that each one felt as though they were indeed in the sanctuary and the spot was holy ground, which even the sound of their voices would desecrate now that the woman's rich vibrant tones had died away and her presence had left them.

That silence was as a benediction which none felt more intensely than did the Rev. Cyril Clifford. He had been an attendant at solemn masses and services, but never before had their solemnity sunk so deeply into his soul as did those latter words of Edna Esbourne's. He had started the controversy with the full intention of breaking down every one of her defences, but, lo ! he who had come to scoff now remained to pray—yes, and pray as he had never felt it possible he could *ever* pray before.

There was not a word spoken, yet his whole heart was at that moment wrapped in earnest worship ; he was unconsciously adoring that Divine Self whom she had just described as dwelling within all beings ; yes, and worshipping with an adoration that he had never even given to the sacrament during Holy Week !

Yes, he thought, there must be something in this new religion to make a woman speak thus and a man feel as he then did. But what it actually was he could not yet grasp nor fully understand—*he only felt it !*

CHAPTER XIV.

HER SOUL'S HUSBAND.

"The various series of states, through which the Divine Ego must penetrate, in order to evolve its soul sphere, are the necessary means by which the internal potentialities of sex must be awakened. When this transpires the Divine Ego becomes pregnant with the dual forms of its own organic life, and the twin souls are born, the male and female elements of its being, which are represented in Genesis as Adam and Eve, knowing neither good nor evil. These twin souls are the absolute expression of the masculine and feminine rays of which every absolute atomic Ego is composed. The masculine ray contains a portion of the feminine elements or there could be no reaction of its forces. The feminine ray must likewise contain a portion of the positive qualities for the same reason. *These souls therefore contain a portion of each other.* They can be neither absorbed nor annihilated by time nor eternity."

—"THE LIGHT OF EGYPT," p. 40.

Edna Esbourne's soul development had been gradual at first, but when she got a strong deep-rooted grasp of the great new truths which had lately been revealed to her the growth had been most remarkable, and to none more noticeable than to the woman herself.

It seemed as though she had always known what she fancied she had but recently learned. There was no question to which she earnestly desired an answer but that she found, if she retired alone, and, in silence and solitude, concentrated her mind upon it, the answer was always forthcoming. Also, that this answer came from no outside source, but from out the depths of her own most wonderful being. She found that her own soul held the Alpha and Omega of her existence, and that when she looked *within* or sought for light in its own holy precincts she received the desired illumination.

It was there she now knew that the Master Teacher meant we were to knock and it would be opened unto us, seek and we should find, ask and we should receive. Here it was the Heavenly Father waited to give His Children all things they had need of, all good gifts they earnestly desired. But they could only obtain them

by first seeking that Kingdom of Heaven within them ; and, once having gained access to its holy of holies, all its treasures were theirs.

Edna had frequently discovered the answers to her doubts and anxieties in the silence of the garden by night, alone under the canopy of heaven, studded with its myriads of stars, or beneath the soft light of the moon. There in mystic self-communing this woman was taught by invisible teachers, and great truths were unfolded to her eager waiting soul. But they were only discerned by the inward vision, only heard by the spiritual ears, only understood by the mind of the spirit, and that alone when she was in at-one-ment with her Higher Self—the Self that is the Comforter and tells us all things and makes all things plain to our understanding.

To these spiritual trysts she could bring only thoughts of holy love, righteousness, forgiveness, and peace, which are the fruits of the spirit, laying aside everything that was unlike the great Exemplar, whom she so desired to emulate and follow in her daily life. Thus she received the promised blessing, for Edna Esbourne had conceived an intense desire, a strong yearning, to become a giver of good to the world—to be a healing power and a strengthening influence to all, but more especially to her own sex, for all her heart's sympathy went forth to womankind.

Since her great sorrow and the attack of brain fever which supervened, Edna had been a very light sleeper and but little slumber sufficed to rest her body. Her brain being unusually active at this time, she found great peace and rest by walking alone in the garden during the quiet midnight hours, when all the others had retired. It was then a tall graceful figure might be seen wandering in the moonlight, or in the silence and calm of a still starry night, when the balmy warmth of the summer made the air soft as "breath of pines from tropic climes." She would seat herself on one of the garden chairs wrapt in contemplation of the beauties all around her, or would, in worshipful mood,

kneel on the green sward and under those silent stars pour out her soul in aspiration to the infinite Father of all souls, seeking from that limitless source the strength, power, wisdom or peace that she needed. From these hours of silent meditation she invariably brought a wondrous power and peace, a peace that radiated from her for days following, so that those beholding her wondered at the revivifying power that stole over them when Edna was near.

It was that invisible something that only soul-communion with the Infinite, contact with the Over-Soul, can bestow upon the one who learns to seek in silence and meditation "the deep and hidden things of God." Sometimes there would well up in her soul such a great wave of overwhelming love—a love that was great enough, broad enough and full enough to embrace all beings. A love that she felt was too full, too wonderful in its power and intensity to retain within her own heart: she must pour it forth like a mighty river into the dry and thirsty souls of God's great human family.

During those moments of ecstasy Edna Esbourne felt as though she were being used as a channel through which, in these latter days, God was pouring out His great love to the world. She felt, too, that it was imperative she should pass it on to others till each and all were filled with this right royal gift of infinite love and mercy. It pulsed through her entire being, causing every nerve to quiver, and her heart and pulses to throb with its mighty force. Yes, yes, this was surely Infinite Love Himself loving through one of His children! It was just as a parent at a distance sends his messages and gifts of love to those at home by the hand of one of the elder brothers or sisters of the family.

So is the great love of the Eternal Father expressed through the hearts and lives of those who become able to do His will as was Jesus the Christ. We are each taught in the school of experience by sorrow and suffering to learn to open ourselves to the inpouring,

and then to go forth and give it unto our many brethren and sisters, in tender sympathy for all their woes, in loving thoughts towards them all, in gentle encouraging words and unselfish actions throughout our daily walk in life.

Edna Esbourne knew that when these great outpourings from above came to her it was to enrich the race, not for herself alone, but for every one with whom she came in daily contact—all whom her mind and heart included in their radius, and also for the hungry waiting crowds of starved souls outside that circle—souls who yearned for love and sympathy. Upon them by voice and pen she must bestow it, so as to satisfy those hearts with good things, that their faith in the All-Father's care be revived and strengthened, and the world know that God was not dead, but that He was a God of the living, and that the more they lived and were conscious of His glorious indwelling life pulsating through every atom of their beings the more would they be able to realize their oneness with the Infinite, and know that all their bodily wants were fully supplied from that inexhaustible source of All Good.

These hours of elevated thought and spiritual revelation were times of great soul-growth to Edna. She would kneel there wrapt in a holy joy, just letting the love, life, power and strength of the Almighty pour through her in a mighty torrent, till she would feel like one transformed, and as though the dominion over all things, promised in the beginning, was indeed hers here and now. Her soul would rejoice and her heart throb with gladness till she was overwhelmed with the glory and vastness within and around her. Then her great dark eyes would fill with tears of gratitude that she had been permitted to "taste and know that the Lord was good." That she was esteemed worthy to experience that supreme delight and eternal peace that passeth the understanding of those who have never tasted it; peace which would keep her mind and heart stayed upon her strong Lord and Shepherd of her soul—the Divine Self, who as the particular

and universal expression of God is everlastingly His "Only Begotten and well-beloved Son, full of Grace and Truth, and with whom He is well pleased." Therefore, each one and all of us can say, "*Now* are we the Sons of God." Such great truths as these and many others would unfold themselves to the woman's soul in these times of reverie and meditation, till she would become lost in contemplation of the greatness of Man, and the gloriously brilliant future that awaited his soul.

It was only when that raw and almost uncanny feeling was in the air, which heralds the first streaks of dawn in the silvering east, before which the night shadows flee away, that Edna would rise from her knees with a full heart, and, stealing through the garden paths, re-enter her room before any of the inmates were astir, and with an illumined mind and enriched soul seek her couch and there slumber peacefully till—

" . . . the first low matin chirp hath grown
Full quire, and morning driv'n her plow of pearl,
Far furrowing into light the moulded rack
Beyond the fair green field and eastern sea."

There was only one in the household, so far, who knew of Edna's midnight watches, and this was Gracie. Sometimes on a hot night she was awake when Edna was passing her door, and in a whisper would breathe her sister's name. Then Edna would steal into the room and, kneeling by the invalid's bed, talk to her in low tones, telling her perhaps—when her mood was a communicative one—of the beautiful thoughts that had been vouchsafed to her during those hours of solitary communing. These nights of quiet secret confidences with her beloved sister were as a bright oasis in the little one's desert, and her tender little heart would swell with gladness while she listened and tried to realize all their grandeur of conception, or to grasp their full meaning as Edna poured them into her eager receptive ears.

It was the night of the same afternoon when Edna and the Rev. Cyril Clifford had had the discussion on the

lawn, that Roger Northbrook, having retired earlier than usual, found it impossible to sleep owing to the intense heat, to which he was unaccustomed, and more especially such unparalleled heat as was then being experienced throughout the central districts of the Colony. Rising from his bed, he tried to read, but the mosquitoes became so troublesome that he got no peace outside the curtains. Then, thinking that a smoke might soothe his nerves and induce repose, he threw on a lounge suit and, taking his pipe, sauntered out into the moonlit garden.

The moon that night had been late in rising and her beams were rather pale, so that the scene was bathed in a soft effulgence, and was wanting in the usual brilliancy which accentuates the splendor of an Australian moonlight night.

Roger Northbrook passed from under the verandah and crossed the stretch of green lawn that lay opposite his door, then, turning into a garden path that led under a honeysuckle and rose-wreathed arbor, emerged into an avenue of box trees, that mingled their boughs overhead, making a canopy of green through which the moonlight shone in fitful gleams, casting fantastic shadows of leafy tracery upon the path below, so that as he walked leisurely beneath its shade he was covered as with a pale embroidered shroud of light which was most effective and very beautiful to an artistic eye. So engrossed was he with the weird effect that for a few minutes he forgot to light his pipe, and stood at the end of the avenue, which he had now reached, looking back upon this picturesque leafy way, and musing silently upon the beauties of Nature.

He had been standing there for some few minutes, perhaps, enjoying the sweet peace of everything around him, which even his footfalls in his slippered feet had not disturbed, when there fell on his ears the soft cadences of a voice—a woman's voice. He turned suddenly and glanced around him, but saw no figure. Was it fancy? he asked himself—or was that the voice of Edna Esbourne? Thoughts of her had been

thronging his mind ever since he retired that evening, and had a good deal to do with his inability to sleep. Then for a short time there was silence. To make sure that his senses had not deceived him, he stood and listened. No, all was still. There was no sound to break the stillness of the night, only the shrill cry of a night-bird overhead and the lowing of the cattle in the paddocks beyond the orchard.

Roger Northbrook began to think he had allowed his fancy to cheat his reason, and that he had heard no voice but the echoes that lingered in his memory of some hours before. He was just in the act of retracing his steps along the avenue and to light his pipe when again he distinctly heard the voice, but this time more clearly than before, and at some little distance from where he stood. He listened intently to make sure his ears were not deceiving him this time, and as he paused in attentive alertness the voice rose clear and distinct, and to his ears were borne the words it spoke—words uttered in such deeply earnest and worshipful tones of adoration and yearning entreaty that they thrilled the man's whole being where he now stood rooted to the spot; the only other worshipper (though an involuntary one) in that leafy cathedral under Nature's own canopy of light.

The voice of the woman rose in quivering, broken accents at first, then rang out full and clear as in self-forgetfulness, till these thrilling words fell upon the ears of the silent listener:

“Oh! my King! my King! I worship Thee eternally! Thou art all beauty, all loveliness! I adore Thee with my whole soul and I now and for ever consecrate myself to Thee. Take me, use me as Thou wilt, so that I but serve Thee and Thee only; so that I be Thy obedient child now and for ever: Thy child now become able to do Thy will and not my own. That holy will that worketh in and through me now, henceforth and for ever. Oh! Eternal Father, let me be a light to my sister women. As I have suffered for them, let me now be used for their good, their

mental and moral freedom, and their spiritual development. My God! I pour out my soul to Thee for the women of Australia. I ask that they may arise to a consciousness of their own divinity; a knowledge of their power and a recognition of what that power demands from them as the highest expression of the Almighty Love: the brooding Mother-Love of the Universe.

"I pray not for our men, my Father, but for our women—the mothers of our race—that they may arise from the degradation of ages and shake off the lethargy into which they have sunken, and be that which Thou hast ordained our sex to be—the moral saviours of our men.

"Oh! Holy Father, make me strong to be and to do for their sakes. Give me wisdom and understanding to speak forth—yea, to cry aloud Thy glorious message to the women of our nation. Let me have courage to face all difficulties and overcome all obstacles, and power to give myself for my sister-women; yea, even if Thou demand that I offer my whole life as a sacrifice upon the altar of love, as did Thy Christ of Judea! Yet never let me shrink or fail, for I have heard Thy loved voice whisper to my soul in the still and silent night-watches and have learned to answer, like Samuel of old, 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'

"Behold the handmaiden of the Lord, and use her now, I beseech Thee, according to Thy holy will. Open the way for me to do that will in Thy own good time and place. Let me be a healing presence to all around me. Let Thy divine love fill me. Oh! let it flow through me till it reach the hearts of all Thy children who yearn after a knowledge of Thee. Let that love cover the whole earth till all shall know Thee, the Everlasting Father. Now clothe me in the robes of righteousness, array me in the beautiful garments of Jerusalem, Thy peace. Sanctify my soul, O! God, till it become Thy everlasting dwelling-place, and I show forth Thy glory as a Christ of Women! Amen. Amen!"

Then the voice ceased and stillness once more reigned. But while these words were vibrating on the still night air, Roger stood listening with every nerve of his being at high tension. Turning in the direction from whence the voice came, he peered through the foliage of the trees of the garden, and a short distance from where he stood beheld a white-robed kneeling figure, with clasped hands and uplifted face raised to the moonlit heavens, which shone down upon the solitary worshipper, enfolding her in the peace for which she craved.

He strained his eyes and watched and listened, forgetting everything else in his absorbing interest in this most remarkable woman. Even the expediency of his action for the moment escaped him while he watched. Then he observed that Edna's face seemed transfigured, and an expression of ecstatic devotion flooded it like a wave of glory. The lips were parted, the eyes open, and fixed upon some point in the distant heavens, while the white light of the moon shed a silvery halo around her form; just as a star can be discerned shining through the misty nebulae from which it is created, so did the embryonic star of Edna Esbourne's soul appear to shine through her body and enclose her in a soft luminance that was like a semi-transparent mantle of opalescent light, or so it seemed to the unseen watcher, who felt as though he were suddenly brought into the presence of a visitant from some celestial sphere.

A shiver passed through him, like one feeling the chill of the night-wind smite him from some unexpected quarter. At the same moment, he knew not by what association of ideas, the lines of Heine's poem recurred to his memory, and he found himself mentally repeating them :

“ A lonely fir-tree was standing
On a cold and barren height,

And it dreamed of a slender palm Tree.”

While his mind was occupied with the but half-remembered verse, he became conscious of a movement near him, and before he had sufficient presence of mind to even turn away, Edna had risen and with a few swift steps was on the path before him robed in her dainty white peignoir ; but when her eyes beheld his stationary form, she gave a slight start as one awakened from a reverie, and stopped suddenly.

He, too, stood silent, not yet able to frame words with which to excuse his presence there in that listening attitude. But it had all been so unintentional, so unusual, for him to be out there at that midnight hour ; least of all had he intended to overhear her prayer. Yet the strangeness of it all and the charm of her presence had cast a weird spell upon him and he was powerless to resist the impulse to remain.

" Ah ! it is only you, my friend ! You, too, are sharing with me the Peace I seek in this temple of worship beneath the midnight stars ? " said the voice of Edna, as she advanced towards him, smiling.

" Yes, it is only I," he responded. " But I must excuse myself to you for being here. It was not deliberate, nor did I intend to be a listener to your prayers, though it was my sacred privilege. I, like yourself, thought I was alone in the garden to-night."

" I am glad indeed, dear friend, that you, too, feel the need of communion with the Over-Soul," said Edna, quickly. " It is but another proof of the oneness of all, of the desire of the growing parts to seek union with the Whole. To me there is no holier hour than the one I spend in this quiet garden by night seeking communion with the Self. Have you also come to 'loafe and invite your soul ? '."

" No, I regret to admit that I cannot claim the highest motive for my presence here to-night," he returned. " Unfortunately, I am not so far advanced on the spiritual ladder as yourself. I could not sleep and wanted to have a smoke, so wandered out here, when I happened to hear a voice—your voice—and—well, I listened."

"I do not mind you, though I admit I would not have spoken my thoughts aloud had I not believed I was alone," she said quietly.

"Let me add my petition to yours, and hope that your noble aspirations may be realized to the fullest degree," he responded gravely, and he looked earnestly at her, as she lifted her eyes to his. Then together they walked slowly along the leafy avenue, when Roger said in low tones :

"Do you know, I think I saw your Higher Self to-night as a visible presence?"

"Did you? Will you tell me how you saw it. How did it appear to you?" she queried, with sudden interest.

"It shone through your body while you poured out your soul in prayer for your sex. You were as one transfigured. I shall now be doubly convinced that we have two minds—the mind of the body, or lower self; and the mind of the spirit, or Higher Self. This latter is the Self that has been growing for ages while the self of the body is but a thing of to-day. It was revealed to me by your own remarkable words the other evening, and now I have seen it for myself." He spoke reverently and slowly as he walked, with head bent, by her side.

"Ah! if you but knew it, then you have seen The Self," cried Edna, in quick eager tones. "Yet strange," she added, reflectively, "that we think we know ourselves, and yet not any of us have ever seen our real selves, not until we find our soul's mate. No man has yet seen himself nor has he seen his friend. That which we look at and call ourselves is but the garment which clothes the real self, for the true self of every man and woman is invisible. What we behold when we look upon our bodies are 'the coats of skins,' which the Lord God (or Spiritual Man) made for mankind—or Adam—the sense-ideas to cover the nakedness of the young ignorant soul—the new-born infant consciousness."

"That is a very fine rendering of the meaning of

'the coats of skins,' " rejoined Roger, " and it is proved in everyday life that a man is what he makes himself by his class of thinking, till his ideas are represented in his body, or flesh, so that the text, 'as a man thinketh in his heart, so is he,' is verified."

"Yes, and the wonderful beauty of it all is that That Dweller in the body is the Ancient of Days ; That, which is the real and eternal, tabernacled within the illusory and transient," she said.

"That is a vast thought ; I have not fully grasped it, I fear," interjected Roger, before she could proceed.

"Well, I look at you and say I see you, but really with my finite eyes I but see the veil of flesh that clothes the real You, conceals the YOU as God sees and knows you. He who dwelleth within at the heart of all, to Him alone are we known. That is the one perfect life, imperishable, beginningless, dwelling among us." Then with a quick flash of inspirational thought peculiar to her, Edna continued, "Oh ! Mr. Northbrook, I found a new idea regarding the Self dwelling in all beings to-night !"

"What was that ? " he asked.

"It came to me thus : That the SELF of every creature is like the Sun—it is one perfect whole, but there are many millions of reflections of it, numerous and varied ways of manifesting and appropriating its light. The Sun shines into every nook and crevice of the system which it governs, and floods all with its light and warmth gratuitously. That light can be used to fill the stately palace or the tiniest hut, the philosopher's study or the thieves' den, and yet the light is not different. It is no brighter, stronger or warmer in the palace than in the hovel—the light is the one light—the only difference lies in how we appropriate it. We can draw down our blinds, close the shutters, allow our windows to become murky through neglect, or shut it out by various devices, yet it still shines on with the same steady light, ever unchangeable, unalterable ; *we only* are the loser through not appropriating it. Then think how beautiful

it is ! The rays that went into the darkest dens of iniquity emerge unsoiled, undimmed, not in the least lessened in purity, warmth, force or beauty : It is as rich to-morrow as to-day and will remain so throughout all time while its system endures.

“ This simile, then, can be applied to the One Life, seated equally in all beings, giving Its glorious life to each one alike : not one more dear than another ; all filled with Its effulgence in like degree. Flooding the soul of each with love, strength, wisdom and power, if we will but lift up the curtains of ignorance, open the windows of our souls and look toward the ‘ hills from whence our help cometh,’ the heights of spiritual consciousness, and allow the light of truth—God Himself—to flood us with His own eternal glory till we are filled with His spirit and transported into regions of consciousness far beyond our present conception, or ‘ into one of the many mansions of our Father’s house.’ ”

While Edna was speaking in her quick, eager tones, the man by her side had listened with head bent in profound attention. Strangely enough, that above all he had learned from this woman, these latter words of hers had taken a strong grip upon his mind. A sublime truth dawned upon him. It seemed too wonderful to be true, and his rational nature was loth to accept it at first. Certainly, he had been thinking and reading a great deal of late upon those subjects, but it was on a different plane from Edna’s, so that his point of view had differed widely from that of this aspiring and enthusiastic soul. But her recent conversations had revealed to him that she had a grander, more comprehensive grasp of this truth than was his own. True, he had skimmed through the leading principles of Pantheism and had examined the tenets of Theosophy, the teachings of the Transcendentalists, the doctrines of Swedenborg ; and now later the claims put forward for this New Thought or Divine Science of these latter days ; but all this merely as mental gymnastics, not because he had any great faith in

them. He admitted that there was much of good in all and something in each of them calculated to make life richer and better and to account for much that was incomprehensible, even to a thinker. There was compensation that other religions failed to afford, since this latter day Thought convinced a man that by his mode of thinking he was the maker of his own heaven and hell; that this world was but a school-house wherein to gain experience and develop souls. But this was about as far as he went. Since, however, he had arrived at this out-back station he had found one—and that one a woman, too!—who opened doors and occasionally gave him a glimpse of something beyond his highest conceptions; something that for a moment he caught sight of, as he had done the day they walked together through the bush, and then its wonders vanished before he could fully satisfy himself that they were real and tangible, not merely visions of the brain.

What was now stranger still to this man was that he should be conscious of a deep desire within his breast—a desire to know and learn more of those hidden mysteries which this woman alone seemed to have the power to reveal to him. She evidently had the key to these mysteries; she held the right of entrance into some unseen presence where she received instruction in mystic lore and learned things that he had never seen written.

How had Edna Esbourne obtained this secret key? Where did she find the "Open, Sesame!" to these hidden truths? Scoff as he might under the ruling power of his man's reason, or bring his intellectual searchlight to bear ever so strongly upon her strange ideas, he was fain to admit that she had voiced truths as vast as the universe, and because the laws of that universe bore them out and a whisper in his own soul echoed them, he could not even attempt to refute them. She outstripped him by leaps and bounds in her grip of the Science of Life, and her understanding of its principles.

It was not only on the lines of the New Thought that she was advanced, but in the originality of her conceptions, and the wonderful beauty of her own ideas upon the subjects she handled during their discussions. The words she had spoken just now echoed in his ears and it was as though a voice were speaking within him silently yet convincingly, saying, "This is the Truth!"

Pausing suddenly in their walk, Roger Northbrook looked steadily into Edna's face, with eager questioning gaze, as though he would put her words to the test, would see for himself that Higher Self which illumined the temple in which It had made Its abode. It was a very beautiful temple, truly. And just now, as she stood calmly smiling into his eyes that searched hers, the light of that pure soul, and the reflected beams of the moon, seemed to vie with each other in brilliancy. Edna returned the gaze he levelled upon her with a steady, calm and kindly expression in her dark eyes—eyes that seemed to be assuring him that "all was well within, for the depths of her being were God's."

Suddenly a great light flashed upon his mind. It was as if the woman had drawn aside a dark curtain and the light came into the chamber of his soul with a drenching flood of glory. Then in a voice rendered tense and strained with deep feeling, Roger ejaculated :
"EDNA!"

She did not move or speak, except for a quiver of the eyelids and a slight trembling of the beautiful lips. She just waited.

"Edna! I know! I see it all now! I understand what it is you have been trying to reveal! Oh, Edna! I never knew it was possible for a mortal to experience such joy! such exhilaration! Tell me, do you understand me?" And he reached both hands out towards her, with an appealing look in tone and manner.

She took them both in hers and held them tightly. There was a quivering joy in her heart and her voice

trembled, so deep was her emotion as she answered in soft earnest tones :

" Oh, Roger ! I am glad, so glad ! I understand it all perfectly. It is the birth of the soul ! I have been through it, and so sudden, so miraculous is its appearing that it takes the breath from our lips and lifts us, as it did Paul, ' into the seventh heaven,' where we do indeed see things too holy to be revealed. Roger, you now know who and what you are—a child of infinite love ! "

" Yes, yes," he answered, his voice husky. " I think that is what I feel most—love ! This sensation embraces every imaginable delight, but I know love, pure love, is uppermost."

" Now you will understand much that has been dark to you. You will taste the great joys that I have experienced and tried to describe to you ; you will know how it is I have grown so rapidly in the things of the spirit. You have wondered before, but you will know for yourself in future," she asserted, while her eyes seemed to blaze with a divine fire, so great was her intensity of joy at this new birth that had taken place before her spiritual vision.

" I do, I do ! I feel it and know it now, Edna ! " he reiterated.

" Ah ! yes, I have prayed for this Roger. Some day you will know why. My own revelation came nearly five years ago. But the revelation whenever it comes and to whomsoever ' is and ever was the same, no matter by what sign or name,' for it is the revelation of the *Self* to the self by the Self. Roger, this that has taken place within your soul to-night is the true marriage—it is the one spiritual union of intellect with intuition, of reason and love. This must take place within your being before it can have its true expression on the visible plane."

" This is the one marriage I desire most on earth," he said, holding her hands still firmly and looking keenly into her face.

" Yes," she added hastily, " you can never desire

another. Now you will know what I meant when I spoke of the marriages of earth. You will understand that such is only uniting the perishable clay, 'the flesh which is as the grass of the field and the flower that withereth and fadeth,' and they ignore the 'Word of the Lord—Spirit—which endureth for ever.' Soul can never be satisfied with such a union. Man being an immortal being, functioning on this physical plane cannot provide happiness for that being in joys that flee away, in acts that have their beginning and end in time, for Man himself, in his true being, lives in eternity."

"Ah! that this might be my eternity, Edna! I shall be satisfied to know that life has given me so much joy," cried Roger.

"In good time you shall experience all the good things of the Kingdom, Roger," she protested. "You will know and fully realize what man truly is. That in his real being he represents heaven and happiness. You will understand that the union of bodies only symbolizes the union of souls. That soul-union is the only true and eternal marriage. It is the condition in which He created them. Then when men and women learn this high and holy truth, which we as enlightened souls must teach them, they will discard all forms and ceremonies, dispense with spoken vows, which are at present so much a part of what is known as marriage! The union within will be indissoluble. They will enter into that one and only divine contract which knows no severance, where the formula of priest and parson, Church and State, will not be required, for they know nothing on earth can bind them closer, nothing in heaven or earth put them asunder. It is a mystic union—a union that never had a beginning in time, and in eternity shall find no end."

"Oh! Edna, that such a union, such a marriage, might be *ours!*" ejaculated Roger, his voice hoarse and quivering with the deep intensity of feeling he was then experiencing.

"The infant soul speaks not of marriage; that is

a joy yet to be understood." she said gravely, withdrawing her hands from his grasp. "The condition of your soul at this moment is but the symbolism of what the divine marriage means—the uniting of two souls as one, a perfect duality in unity; and, with the Father of all spirits enthroned in the very centre—the holy of holies of their united souls—The Holy Trinity is thus established and the sacred mystery of divine marriage revealed. The bridegroom then may claim his bride. From such unions the perfect sons of God who are ever and always 'Christs,' shall be born, and every heart will recognize its redeemer. Every child shall know in very truth that the eternal God is its Father, since every birth from such unions would be an immaculate conception, through the perfect idea each should have of his divinity, and thus it would be a divine incarnation!"

"Ah! would thy heart but be a manger for the birth, God would once more become a child on earth."

Edna's voice ceased speaking, and the man stood silent before her, reproved. His impulsive feelings and deep admiration for this woman had carried him away and he had been strongly impelled to clasp her in his arms and woo her as he would woo the woman he would wed. But Edna's look, tone and words effectually checked him. He saw that she looked for something higher and grander from him, and unconsciously his heart and his soul united to render the homage she demanded.

"Forgive me!" he said simply. "Forgive me and teach me the better way. Tell me how to realise the hope that has stolen into my heart to-night!"

"I will, you know I will, Roger, my dear, dear friend," she answered tenderly. "You shall see what grand and glorious possibilities are opening up for you in the future: to be able to understand all these sacred mysteries, to know that you hold within your own marvellous being such wondrous powers, only waiting to be recognized and hence revealed!" Then she paused, and, clasping her hands close against her bosom,

stood before him, looking gravely into his face, while her voice dropped to a lower key, and took on a more solemn note as she resumed :

" Oh ! Roger, do you know that sometimes it makes me feel as though I stood in strange awe of myself : as if I were someone whom I did not even know and have never really known—just someone in the disguise known as me : someone dwelling within what I have fancied was me, and occasionally I get a little glimpse of this strange being—just flashes only—but they amaze me more and more every time I am privileged to behold *It*—that Dweller in my body ! For instance," she pursued, as a graver light stole into her eyes, " I have been standing before my mirror and all at once I have beheld a strange *Me* looking through my eyes at me in the glass. I have watched for some time spell-bound and have at times drawn back in fear and dread catching my breath at the moment through awe of this Stranger within. Then I have at times yearned with an unutterable longing to look closer and deeper and to know *Who* it is that views me through my own eyes. Then my whole soul has thrilled with a strange new life as if the entire power wisdom and love of the universe were for the moment contained within me. Yes, in *me* " she repeated impressively. " And then—" she paused, with a catch in her breath.

Roger Northbrook could not trust himself to speak so engrossed was he with watching the various expressions and emotions that flitted over Edna's face ; he only answered with his eyes and a slight movement of his head. Then she continued in a solemn tone that was almost a prayer :

" Well it makes me draw back in breathless awe and—and *worship* ! "

The last word fell from her lips with a reverence and intensity that caused it to sink almost to a whisper. A silence fell between them and the man and woman stood there face to face, eye to eye, peering as it were into the depths of each other's souls with a deeply

questioning gaze while a mystic light illumined their faces. It was as though the last word uttered by the woman had been the talisman required to reveal the presence of a Third Person ; and they both felt that that Third Person was there ; and during that solemn hour, " bid the earth (or lower self) keep silence before Him."

There was a wondrous sense of harmonious unity between them and yet though outwardly a duality they were indeed a trinity also. This conscious presence of a Third Person inspired their souls with a sacred fire which the word "worship" just uttered by Edna alone adequately expressed.

Yes, *it was Worship*—the true worship of the Infinite by the finite ; of the Divine by the human. As Emerson expresses it—" I the imperfect adore my own Perfect." And this was their own Perfect ; their conscious Divinity which stood between them now as one expressed through two—yet *only one*. This was the eternal Life Principle, the essence of all souls ; the objectified form of the Father-Mother-God manifested in this soul-union of two half-souls which as one in consciousness had rushed together without any movement on the part of that through which they manifested—their bodies. This union alone united them in the bonds of perfect and sacred love ; holy, pure and undefiled by thought, look, word, or act ; and thus manifested the masculine-feminine Man : He who alone can be the spiritual Man, the offspring of the Father. Here in truth was the living macrocosm revealed in the incarnate microcosm.

It was this that had thus expressed Itself without any conscious thought or effort on the part of these two advanced souls as they stood there at that solemn moment conscious now of the holy marriage which had taken place between them as souls only. A marriage at which one high priest alone can officiate—the Priest of the Most High God who is King of Salem City of Peace. He who is after the order of Melchizedek, and administers the bread and wine in

the holy of holies of our soul. It is He alone who can join together two hearts, minds and souls in a spiritual union such as these two beings were experiencing, and which can never be sundered. He it was who formed the Third Person, made the Trinity in that unity, and stood revealed to each within the other; not "as through a glass, darkly, but now face to face," but knowing each other as they were known to themselves and to God—perfect, one whole. For the man looked into the soul of the woman and saw there his better, purer, higher Self, and knew her to be that very Self objectified. The woman beheld in the soul of the man revealed before her the nobler, stronger, grander complement of her own soul—the other half that made the perfect whole—and these seeming two were one.

Thus, in the calm of the night, beneath the soft white veil of the moonlight, which enveloped them in its pure beams, in absolute silence, with peace wrapping them round as with a garment, not even a whispered word, not an avowal of spoken love of any kind; not a look of what the world calls love on either side; not even a touch of the hands—thus were those two kindred souls *wedded!* United forever by a mystical tie that the world could never sever; that nothing on earth nor in heaven could dissolve; which no Church, nor State, nor Judge, nor Priest, nor Law, nor Man, nor God could forge closer or bind faster, or even annul under any conditions, either in this life or the life to come, throughout an eternity of eternities. *For this alone is Divine Marriage!*

They stood in absolute silence, as the world understands silence, yet it was a silence that was eloquent, for the voice of the infinite spoke within them. That voice which spake the Universe, and Man its Crown, into being; and later breathed o'er Eden (the Soul); and again thundered on Sinai's mountain; and whispered "Peace be still," to Galilee's turbid waters. It was that same voice that spoke through their souls with an eloquence which no pen could record. Yet no voice was heard by mortal ears. It was the Voice of

the Spirit. And their listening souls, united as one in sweet accord, heard that voice as did the dwellers in Eden, and hearing, obeyed; and instead of the curse, they now received the blessing!

Then they knew that their souls had leaped into each other's embrace and were locked there in a mystic union over which time, as they knew it, had no control; and eternity could not divide. It was a deep, pure, silent, holy ecstasy; a wondrous joy that filled them both to overflowing. It was the strange awe-inspiring revelation of a deep and sacred mystery; a mystery that dared not be expressed in words. It could not be spoken, it could only be felt by those fitted to experience it, and in deepest, purest, truest enjoyment, to understand its meaning—a meaning that was too grand, too wonderful to attempt to interpret; but it was in itself all sufficing. It was divine love!

They were held there as by a spell; the perfect harmony was complete; nothing that earth could offer nor bestow could equal it, and nothing could be added unto it. At that moment they two stood on the pinnacle of ecstasy—life, worlds, time to them were as though they were not. Only eternity itself could contain them! Thus, for several minutes, though years of soul experience, these two beings stood facing each other, not touching even so much as the hem of each other's garments; not a movement of their forms; scarcely conscious of the passing of their breath; oblivious of everything around but their own spiritual being.

Their faces were pale with the depth of their inner emotions, and showed still whiter in the rays of the moon. Only their eyes were alive—alive with a spiritual fire that had been kindled on the altar of their hearts as a holy sacrifice, the fumes of which rose like sweet incense to their lips—while the white glow was reflected deep in the orbs of each, and shone there with a steady gleam. It was a light that could only come from the depths of pure souls, undefiled by so much as the shadow of an unholy thought or impure desire

Yet, despite all this apparent physical separation, they each knew that their souls at that moment were clasped in a close, life-long—nay, an eternal embrace ; that they belonged to each other alone for ever and for ever. No matter who in this mortal world might stand between them, they were true husband and wife ; they were married there that night by the only ceremony that should ever be called by the holy name of marriage !

Their hands, their lips, their bodies, were strangers ; yet these two were now wedded in soul before God, more truly, more indissolubly than were ever mortals wed. This assuredly was the union of the beginning ; the spiritual marriage of our first parents till Adam, the primitive man, in his ignorance, misunderstood it (as men still do to-day), and beholding the woman as something apart from himself—a separate soul and body—fell away from the true conception of what she actually was to him ; and so, in defiling her by thought, really defiled himself and has suffered through long ages in consequence. Such defilement consists in what is *thought* about the act that is supposed to have constituted the Fall of Man—not in the act itself ; for Jesus plainly said, “ He who looketh upon a woman to lust after her, hath committed adultery already in his heart.” The body really has no active part in such a perfect union of souls, as is that which constitutes true and holy marriage, beyond being the sacred vessel which holds the wine of the Spirit of Life, and so enables it to express itself and manifest Its marvellous powers.

The man was the first to break the spell that bound them in such sweet and hallowed silence, such holy Love ! Suddenly, with a deep indrawn breath that was partly pain, wholly delight, he awakened to his humanity from the dream of his newly-born divinity ; and the awakening revealed to his sense-consciousness his human needs. Then the revelation flashed over him of what it was had come to him that night. It was a great and wondrous love for this woman, whose face at that instant shone upon him with a soft light that

was not the reflection of the moon's rays only, but the glow of a soul newly awakened to a fuller and clearer realization of its true self ; its own divinity. A soul that felt stirring within it all those innate powers and larger possibilities which had been revealed to it in a moment of time ; and seeing, stood, as it were, transfixed with wonderment at its own majesty !

This was his soul's partner ; this woman alone was, or ever could be, his *wife* : in very truth heart of his heart, soul of his soul—one Spirit ! In that moment of conscious felicity at what had come to him, everything, everyone else was forgotten—obliterated from his memory completely. Then with an eager impulsive movement, Roger Northbrook, the calm, self-contained master of himself, was conquered. The soul in him alone spoke through his lips and in accents of deepest emotion, of keenest joy he sprang towards Edna, crying ecstatically—

“ My wife ! my queen ! my soul's partner ! I know you now, I claim you as my own, mine forever ; I worship you ! ”

As he uttered these words he caught her left hand and would have drawn her to his breast and enfolded her there in a close embrace, but his movement and voice aroused Edna to a consciousness of her surroundings, and recalled her from the wrapt contemplation of her other self—her soul's mate—and brought her back to the form or body in which it was tabernacled ; and before Roger could close his arms about her she drew back with a quick movement, and raising her right arm in the attitude of a benediction, said reverently, gently, and in tender accents :—

“ Hush ! Roger, beloved ! Worship God on-y ! He has been with us, He is here now, and the spot we stand upon is holy ground. Put every earthly thought far from you, and let us worship only the Highest to-night, my soul's husband ! ”

“ My love ! My soul's queen ! Do I not worship Him best in and through you ? ” he insisted. “ See ! ”

Then with a quick movement he lifted his cap

from his head, and still holding her left hand stood for a moment bareheaded before her ; his fine face filled with a great love : he raised his eyes to the moonlit vault above them ; and before Edna was aware of his action he had dropped on his knees by her side and catching both her hands in his, covered them with passionate kisses, exclaiming :—

“ True worship is of the heart, beloved ; and such worship I now give unto as much of God as I behold in you—a perfect woman—therefore His highest creation, truly. What grander worship could He demand from mortal ? ” he cried passionately, gazing up into her face as her beautiful eyes rested calmly yet lovingly upon him where he knelt.

“ And such worship He accepts in His holy temple—has accepted to-night already—and I thank Him with a deep and holy gratitude, a sacred joy,” replied Edna quietly. “ But come, my beloved, husband of my soul, it is enough. Let us now part. We shall never again be severed, for we shall ever remember this holy marriage night when our souls were wedded ! ”

He rose in obedience to her wish. Then for a few moments stood holding her hands in his ; but seeing in her face a light too pure, too sacred to dispel, by further entreaties of his, he quietly let her hands fall from his clasp and with a half-whispered word more like a sigh, breathed—

“ Good-night, my beloved ! ”

“ Good-night—nay, see ! it is Good-morning. Roger, this is a new day and at this hour more than the day is born. Good-morning ! ”

She turned, with a parting smile and a movement of her hand, then swiftly disappeared among the shadows of the trees, leaving him standing there alone with uncovered head, beneath the half-lights of the dawn, watching her form as it glided among the shrubs of the garden, now hidden, now dimly defined, till she vanished within the house.

Then was Roger Northbrook conscious of a new want, a strong desire in his heart that lent a new purpose

to life. He knew that from that moment when light, new and marvellous light, burst upon him, his whole being had undergone a change. He had that night—that wondrous night—passed through a transformation as mystical as it was unseen and unexpected. Yes, he had experienced a new birth; and it was the birth of his immortal soul.

CHAPTER XV.

THE ACCIDENT IN "FOREST GLADE."

"There are times and seasons when to be still demands immeasurably higher strength than to act. Composure is often the highest result of power."

—CHANNING.

The following morning all was bustle and hurry for the picnic to "Forest Glade." The spot chosen was a pretty wooded glade situated on the right bank of the Murrumbidgee River and about three hours' drive from the house. The morning broke clear, and the day promised to be exceedingly hot later on, so after an early breakfast a start was made in time to avoid the heat of the mid-day sun. The majority occupied seats in the commodious bush "sociable," others in "sulkies," while the remainder were on horseback. The riding party included Roger Northbrook, Frank, and Ella Esbourne, Amy Godfrey, and a new arrival at the Homestead, Mr. Victor Barcombe, who was an acknowledged admirer of Ella's.

The season of the year was not just the best for such an outing, more especially as the drought was at that period raging in the West, and to the eye of a stranger—like the Rev. Cyril Clifford, fresh from England—the appearance of the Riverina was not exactly prepossessing. The way lay across some fine open country, which afforded a splendid view of the surrounding district; and already signs of the prolonged dry season were visible on the landscape. The water-holes were all dried up, the sheep were straying wearily about in search of a patch of green herbage,

while away in the distance the sun-dried red plains stretched to a grey timber belt on the edge of which a quivering mirage could be distinguished. Patches of dejected-looking roots of "old-man" saltbush, broke the monotony of the plains, where the prevailing color notes were the well-known grey and blue that paint the country in drought time. Here the soil was hard as pavement. All that was loose had been swept away, leaving the surface as clean as though some great broom had passed over. In the near distance, to the left of the track, stood a belt of sad colored trees, while before them were the grey, stunted, wind-swept stalks of the saltbush—all that was left since the hungry travelling stock had passed over the ground. Round the roots, and in patches here and there, little eddies of dust circled into the air, gathered up by a passing current of hot wind that drew them up into revolving spiral cones, called by the aborigines "willy-willies." And over all this was the kind of sky which to poets and bushmen is known as "brassy," while the entire landscape was bathed in dazzling sunshine.

"What a dreadful country!" ejaculated the Rev. Cyril Clifford, as his eye scanned the stretch of wilderness which they were just then skirting. "How can anyone live here from choice?" he questioned, in tones of undisguised disgust.

"You are seeing it just at its worst, Mr. Clifford," replied Edna, whose seat in the sociable was next to his. "When the drought breaks and the rain comes, this will all be covered with lovely grass and rich herbage, then the stock will look sleek and fat again. You must come up later, or I should say, earlier in the year, to see it at its best."

"I hardly imagine such a country could ever have 'a best' in the real meaning of the superlative degree," observed Cyril. "To me it looks too dreadful for contemplation at any time. The barrenness, the dreariness, the desolation is simply awful. I am glad to know that I am destined for a city life, if this is a sample of the Australian bush!" he added, with an

expression of self-complacency that was by no means altruistic, seeing that most of those who were with him had to spend the greater part of their existence in the district he was condemning.

"Oh! you would soon get used to it, and by-and-bye would like it as much almost as we do," remarked Ella, who was at that moment riding near the buggy and overheard Cyril's remark."

"I am quite sure I never should, Miss Ella," he protested.

"Don't be too sure, Mr. Clifford," she replied, laughingly. "Nearly everyone who comes here at first feels much the same as you do. But after a time the bush has a strange fascination for them, and once they take to it finally, they will seldom leave it for long at a time. Like an old digger to the goldfields, the true bushman is sure to wander back again."

"Well, a great change would have to come over me—a transformation, indeed, I may say—to ever make me contented to live out here for any length of time," insisted the young clergyman, in a tone of conviction.

A quiet smile wreathed the corners of Edna's mouth, while Ella retorted gaily, "Well, wait till you've had a few seasons in the city, I bet you'll be glad to seek the rest and quiet of these despised wilds."

"I don't bet, Miss Ella, but I am willing to assert very positively that I do not think I shall," he asserted.

"We'll see, we'll see; I've met others like you before this," laughed Ella, merrily. "I am sure I'll have the laugh at you yet, Mr. Clifford," and touching her mare with the whip, she nodded her pretty head knowingly, and cantered off to join the other equestrians of the party.

It was about an hour before noon when they arrived at the picnic ground, and so different was the spot from that of the country through which they had passed that even the Rev. Cyril indulged in a little mild praise.

There, by the banks of the Murrumbidgee, giant

blue gums reared their stately heads, and ash, cedar, tamarind and beech, all mingled their branches above, excluding the rays of the noon-day sun. Suspended from the massive tree trunks, creepers hung in tropical profusion, and wild mistletoe berries lay scattered on the mossy turf below. High in the branches of blood-wood trees grew numbers of stag-horn and pheasant-nest ferns. Giant nettles with their leaves of treacherous beauty flourished luxuriantly. Sassafras oozed forth upon the air its scented sap, filling the atmosphere with perfume. High overhead flocks of wild birds scared from their retreat by the unaccustomed noise flew screaming in affright. Truly an ideal spot for a summer outing everyone declared. And under the trees in this sylvan dell the luncheon was spread.

While they were all grouped around enjoying the good things which the girls had taken special pride in providing, Ella Esbourne announced that she had induced Mr. Northbrook to let her conduct him back through Forest Glade and that Amy, Frank and Victor had also consented to accompany them. They would get a good view of the country from that particular point, where a belt of forest skirted the foot of the hills. It was a more circuitous route but Ella had assured them that the view was well worth the extra journey; only those on horseback, however, could undertake it on account of the roughness of the track. "Forest Glade" had been named by the Esbournes themselves and was one of their favorite show places for visitors. It was a long way round from where they were then camped but only a ten-mile ride from the homestead direct—being on the extreme northern boundary of their father's run.

On hearing of this proposition Edna considered it would be much too wearying a journey for their guests and advised Ella to leave the visit to the "Glade" for another day. But her sister was determined on this occasion to have her own way, and to avoid further parley over the subject, Edna yielded. Ella knew quite well that Edna would have much

preferred that Mr. Northbrook should return with the main party, but she was determined to show that it also lay in her power to attract this serious Englishman with her merry ways and bright vivacious chatter, equally as well as her more sedate sister, with her long and tiresome conversations on metaphysical subjects. These topics never did and never could appeal to the gay spirited Ella, and she could not understand what Mr. Northbrook could find in them to entertain him so that he would stay talking to Edna by the hour together instead of taking part in their amusements. She could excuse Edna for being serious and religiously inclined, because of her great sorrow; but Mr. Northbrook was quite inexcusable. So on this particular day she made up her mind to monopolise Roger. This, though, in truth was more to tantalize Victor Barcombe than to gratify her vanity or annoy Edna.

In one respect, however, she was successful; for that day Roger never had one moment alone, nor an opportunity for a few minutes' quiet chat with Edna; so persistently did Ella, with Amy Godfrey as an ally, demand his help and interest in all that was going on, and generally monopolize him. As to whether Roger quite appreciated this unremitting attention bestowed upon him by the two girls he was the best authority. Certainly he showed no disinclination to enter into all propositions for affording amusement to them and the rest of the company, and threw himself heartily into the pleasures of the day, as also did Edna. Only once did their hands accidentally touch while together they were opening a hamper, and their eyes met in silence; but that look spoke volumes for the memory of the previous night. However, this little trick of Ella Esbourne's was one that she never attempted to play again, for the after events of that day were indelibly impressed upon her memory, so that she could never look back upon them without a shudder and a feeling of keenest remorse.

Towards three o'clock the usually bright, almost molten, sky became suddenly overcast; and great

masses of dense black clouds hung low on the western horizon. A heavy thunderstorm was predicted and unless it passed over towards the south-east—as so many had done recently and spent their fury and welcome showers far out at sea—the picnickers would certainly get the full benefit of it. In view of this approaching storm it was decided to make a start for home an hour earlier than was at first intended. Then arose the question as to which route the riders would take. The majority decided to take the one by which they had come. It was the nearest and the safest, for level country was crossed most of the distance and there was very little timber *en route*; while the way through “Forest Glade” lay through a thick belt of forest and broken hilly country. This was pointed out to Ella by Edna, but she wilfully pooch-pooched the very idea of fear, and vowed she cared nothing for a paltry thunder shower; and added with youthful assurance that “she was sure neither did Victor nor Mr. Northbrook. In either case they might but get a ducking, whether on the red ridges or in ‘Forest Glade.’”

“Unless I am very much mistaken, Ella,” said Edna gravely, “this storm will be more than a tropical cloudburst. If it comes up as it threatens now to do, we shall get the full benefit of its fury, and you will be in the thick of it long before you can reach the ten-mile boundary.”

“Oh! well, I think we’ll risk it, at any rate,” and in her impulsive wilfulness Ella flourished her whip and called to the other two, who were agreeable to accompany her, “to hurry up!” In view of the coming storm, Amy declined to join them.

Roger had not heard the discussion between the sisters, and he replied to Ella’s call that he would be with her as soon as he had fixed his saddle girth; Edna then felt she could say no more against Ella’s excursion without seeming unusually officious about the safety of their guests at the cost of their pleasure.

A start was at length made and Edna with the

others watched the three ride off—Ella leading, with Victor and Roger in her wake. As Roger passed the spot where Edna stood smiling her adieux, he raised his hat and said, "Good-bye just now. A safe journey home."

Edna bowed her head in reply and once again their eyes met for an instant; the next he had passed on to the group in front. But little did each then guess how they should meet again!

"Good-bye all!" cried Ella, flourishing her whip as she cantered off, and managing her spirited little mare, "Flirt," with the admirable skill for which the Australian bushwoman is famed. "Come along, Victor, how slow you are!" she protested, as young Barcombe lingered to reply to a parting sally of Frank's. Then—"I say, Edna, we'll race you home and defy the storm, too, with all its imaginary dangers," cried the mischievous girl, as she tossed her head with a bright rippling laugh at her sister's rather anxious face and clouded brow.

A few minutes later the three were out of sight, hidden by the thick undergrowth which bordered the track they had chosen. The remainder of the party then hastened to pack up their traps and make a start for home, too.

The road taken by Ella and her two companions lay for some distance through thick bushland, and then opened into level treeless country, whence they could proceed at an easy canter. After about an hour's riding they came to a part of the plain which was covered with stunted shrubs and broken hilly ground. Here their progress was not so easy, and just before them, not above a mile or two distant, lay the dark belt of bush known to them as "Forest Glade."

The storm had now been brewing for some time, making its presence known by swift lightning flashes and ominous rumbles of distant thunder. Suddenly it broke upon them in wild and terrible fury. The lightning flashed around them like tongues of living flame, almost blinding the riders and maddening their

horses. The thunder crashed over them with a deafening roar like the report of numberless cannon simultaneously discharged, causing the ground beneath the horses' feet to vibrate and the speeding animals to snort with fear. The sky above was as black as ink and all around them as they galloped madly onward to reach the shelter of the Glade, was a darkness dense as a sable pall. They could not see their way nor distinguish the track even so much as a horse's length ahead. They could only trust to the instinct of their terrified beasts. Roger shouted to the others that they had better remain on the open plain till the worst of the storm had spent itself; but his voice was lost in the crash of thunders, and the horses were now too restive and terrified to be brought to a standstill. To make matters worse, at this juncture the rain came down in torrents, breaking over them like a waterspout, and in a few minutes they were all drenched to the skin. Ella took the lead now, and insisted upon pushing on as best they could to reach the shelter of the bush, as they could not possibly be worse there than out on that open rain-swept waste. Knowing the way, she preceded the other two, who followed in single file when they reached the forest belt. Nothing was clearly distinguishable, enveloped as they were in such thick darkness, illuminated only at intervals by the blinding lightning flashes. However, the girl felt pretty sure of her bearings and having confidence in herself and the sure-footedness of her steady little mare, she declared that she could conduct them safely through the Glade if they would but keep in close touch with her; and should the storm not have abated by then, they would seek shelter at the shepherd's hut on the edge of the ten-mile boundary. So Ella led them on, threading her way among the trees as best she could in the uncertain light. One minute the depths of forest would be plunged into inky darkness, and the next would be illumined with a brilliancy that was as bright as day. The wind and rain swept behind the riders, and continuous thunder crashed over their heads, till they were

like fugitives fleeing before a pursuing host. All the while Ella's conscience was whipping her keenly for her stubborn determination to undertake this long route home. She knew by the fury with which the storm broke over them that its area was limited, and that the rest of the party had most probably escaped. But the girl would not falter in her purpose. She would never give in, so set herself with all her nerve to carry out the task she had so recklessly undertaken merely to satisfy a foolish whim, a girlish vanity!

Victor Barcombe followed Ella as closely as he could while Roger brought up the rear some short distance behind, within hail. He could just distinguish the other figures ahead when the lightning flashes lit up the darkness of the woods. The horse he was riding was of rather an uncertain temper, and, being high-spirited, evinced a nervous irritability under restraint, especially when the thunder pealed or the lightning flashed with more than usual intensity. Ella had cautioned Roger to give "Geebung" a loose rein, yet to keep sufficient control over him to prevent him from bolting. In this particular instance, however, Roger used his own judgment, not being too sure of his ground, so kept a tight curb on the animal's mouth, which did not tend to improve its temper. They were now perhaps about half-way through Forest Glade, and, needless to say, had seen none of its boasted beauties, save for the grandeur of the great tree trunks standing out like white ghosts from the background of gloom that enveloped them. But not one of the three were then in a humour to enjoy even these weird effects. They were too anxious to seek shelter, safety and personal comfort, and their only anxiety and desire was to make the best of their way through this dense wilderness of towering gums. Even the pungent odor of the eucalyptus, which scented the air and oozed from the bruised and sodden leaves over which their horses' feet trod, afforded them no pleasure. Their minds were concentrated upon one purpose, and that was to find a haven of shelter from the terrors of such a storm.

At that moment a vivid flash of forked lightning shot its tongues of yellow flame right across their path, and they involuntarily closed their eyes to shut out its dazzling brilliancy. The next instant their ears were startled by a crashing, creaking, tearing sound in front, and Ella's trained ears knew the meaning of that sound too well. With a scream she pulled her horse back till it reared upon its haunches, and cried in terrified voice, "Back! keep back! It has struck the big tree in front! Back, for your lives! it is falling this way!"

Hearing her words and obeying her voice and movements, Victor Barcombe, who was close behind Ella, reined in his horse, turned off the track, and allowed the animal to make its own way through the bush in the opposite direction. But Roger, who was farther behind, did not catch Ella's warning words, and the noise of the crashing timbers of the falling forest giant drowned all other sounds, while the rattle of the volley of thunder that followed the blinding flash was deafening and distracting in the midst of such stygian darkness. "Geebung" snorted and plunged madly, then reared and became restive under Roger's nervous grip of the reins. The next moment he bolted right into the path of danger and death. Then there was a crash, a thud, a sudden fall, and Roger Northbrook knew no more.

So great was the terror that had taken hold of the other two horses that they fled through the bush like hunted beasts, threading their way through the trees with a strange and wonderful accuracy. Neither rider attempted to control them, but just let them have their heads, knowing that under circumstances such as these the instinct of the horses was better far than their own faulty judgment.

At last Ella and Victor saw daylight ahead, and found they were now almost through the Glade. A little further on and they were once more clear of the timbered belt and out on the open clearing not quite a mile from the boundary fence. There had been no

time for anything whilst in the scrub but to hold tightly to their terrified beasts. Immediately Ella gained the open she reined in her mare and, turning to Victor, who was close behind her, said—

"You are safely through? But where is Mr. Northbrook?"

"Yes, thank the gods, I am safe, and you also!" he replied breathlessly, as he wheeled his panting horse round beside Ella's little mare, which stood with raised head and distended nostrils quivering with fear. "What an escape, Ella!" he exclaimed.

"But where is Mr. Northbrook?" reiterated Ella. "Surely he was close behind us?"

"My dear girl, I don't know. Who could hear anything with such a row going on. It was a terror; but, my word, Ella, you're a brick!"

"Oh! Victor, be quiet, till I listen if Mr. Northbrook is coming," interrupted Ella, impatiently, and she turned her ear to the wind to listen for the thud of "Geebung's" hoofs. But there was only the sound of the distant roll of thunder and the drip, drip of the rain from the leaves to be heard.

The storm had almost spent itself, its fury was past and the rain was abating. Sheet lightning played over the tops of the trees as the clouds lifted, and the sunset glow shone forth in golden gleams on the western horizon, weirdly contrasting with the dark background of forest and lighting up the vast stretch of undulating pasture lands.

"Do you know I feel much afraid that something has happened to Mr. Northbrook; he ought to be here now. Let's 'coc-ee' for him," said Ella, in anxious tones.

They both gave vent to two or three long-sustained "coo-ees" that brought no response to their straining ears. Then Ella turned to Victor and said—"There's something wrong. I'm going back to look for him."

"What? Not if I can prevent it!" cried Victor, in alarm. "Why! you're shivering now and will catch your death of cold, Ella. Besides, what could

have happened to him that has not overtaken us? Mr. Northbrook's not a fool and can manage a horse as well as any of us," he protested.

Ella's great concern rather nettled the young man, who had not been without a sensation of jealousy during the day owing to her marked preference for the company of the Englishman.

"Indeed I'm not so sure of 'Geebung,' his temper is so uncertain; I wish Mr. Northbrook had not been riding him to-day," remarked Ella, her anxiety increasing as there was still no appearance of Roger, nor any sound of his approach.

"Well," argued Victor, "even supposing anything has happened we could be of little use alone. Come, let us ride to the hut and get the shepherd's assistance and a lantern. But probably you are alarming yourself unnecessarily, for 'Geebung' may have started off in another direction when the tree fell, and now be galloping home by the way we came." To tell the truth, Victor Barcombe was arguing against his own convictions, but, man-like, he did not half relish the idea of the girl he loved risking her life for the sake of another man. Though probably, had the case been reversed, he would doubtless have made no great objection, hoping that love might prompt the sacrifice. His arguments and suggestions were, however, all wasted upon Ella. She would not listen to any delays, stating that the boundary rider, Malpus Brown, might not be at his hut, and there would be time lost by the journey.

"I am going back, Victor, to where the tree was struck," asserted Ella, in decided tones.

"Then I go with you," he answered doggedly.

"Come along, then, let us lose no more time," she returned.

Together they turned their horses' heads towards the thick scrub from which they had so recently emerged in such terror. Both animals shied at re-entering that gloomy labyrinth, but Ella Esbourne did not lack pluck, and with a firm determined hand urged

her little mare to obey her, while Victor succeeded in compelling his horse to do likewise.

As they penetrated deeper and deeper into the scrub, Ella continued her calls, but received no answer. For fully three-quarters of a mile they retraced their steps in the deep gloom that was now fast gathering, for it was getting late—the night was settling down, and there would be no moon till very late. It was only Ella's familiarity with the landmarks that made it at all possible for them to proceed, and her intrepid courage made her stick to her self-imposed task till she had satisfied herself that Roger Northbrook was not lying injured anywhere near where the tree had fallen; in which case she would be willing to believe Victor's suggestion that "Geebung" had taken the other route home, and that Roger would be safe. As they neared the spot, Ella advised that they should dismount and pick their way on foot through the tangle of boughs. Accordingly they did so and, tethering their horses, together groped along the rain-soaked ground, feeling their way before them, with hands outstretched. The stillness was awful, only the drip of the raindrops, or the skurry of a rabbit in the undergrowth broke the silence of the bush. Cautiously picking her way through broken branches and interlacing boughs of the shattered tree, Ella made slow progress. At length she reached the great blackened trunk of the giant blue gum which had been struck by the lightning, and, climbing over it, dimly discerned before her in the gloom a dark body, which she touched. It was the damp skin of an animal, stiff but not yet cold. She knew but too well it was the body of poor "Geebung," and for a few moments a queer sensation passed through her, a sensation which seemed to paralyze her tongue and made her incapable of movement or thought.

For the first time during all those trying hours Ella's nerve forsook her; for she knelt there dumb with terror and with a dreaded horror of what she might discover on the opposite side of the dead horse.

The voice of Victor Barcombe at last aroused her from the strange lethargy which was creeping over her senses.

"What is the matter, Ella? What are you doing? Have you found anything?" he cried, when he heard no sound from her nor any movement among the twigs.

Then she gave vent to a hoarse cry of mingled pain and fear. The next minute Victor was by her side, bending over her as she crouched with her face covered by her hands, as though she wished to shut out from her vision that which she feared to behold.

"Good God! 'Geebung' dead—killed! And Northbrook—where is he?"

The girl by his side was silent, and Victor fearing she had fainted, threw his arm around her and lifted her to her feet.

"Be brave, Ella, dear," he whispered. "It may not be as bad as we think. Come away. Let me take you out of this."

The young man's touch aroused the numbed senses of the girl and, nerving herself, she protested against being removed from the spot where she now knew her services would be required.

"No, no, Victor. I am all right. It was only the shock," she stammered tremblingly. "Please find out if Mr. Northbrook is—is—"

She dared not voice the alternative of her hopes and only shuddered as Victor moved towards the other side of that dark heap. A few moments sufficed to reveal the truth, for there lay Roger close by the dead horse. One leg was fast beneath the animal's body, and his head lay among a tangle of broken boughs and shattered limbs of the fallen tree. This was all that Victor could distinguish in the darkness, then, striking a match, together they made careful examination of the motionless forms of both horse and rider. The former was quite dead, and to all appearance so was his rider. There was a deep jagged wound on Roger's right temple from which a stream of blood had flowed

freely down his cheek and left a dark clotted trail, which contrasted with the ghastly pallor of his face. The eyes were closed and there were no respiratory movements noticeable.

"Oh! Victor! Victor! He is dead!" cried Ella, bursting into tears. "It is all my fault, because I would insist upon returning this way! What shall I do? What shall I do?" she moaned.

"What nonsense, Ella!" exclaimed Victor. "It was not your fault, dear. You could not help the storm coming, nor the tree falling. Besides, it might just as easily have happened to you or to me," he argued, trying to soothe her. "Come, cheer up, dear; he may only be stunned, not—not dead," and with real concern for her grief, the young man furtively kissed the tear stained cheek of the girl.

The action aroused Ella and she drew herself away from Victor's encircling arms, and once more bent over the prostrate form of the injured Roger; but Victor promptly drew her away.

"No, dear, no," he protested. "You can do nothing now, Ella." Then, awakening to the necessity for some action, he added, quickly: "Do you think you could reach the shepherd's hut on the boundary, and send the man to help me lift the body of the horse? I will mount guard here in case he comes round in the meantime."

"Yes, yes, I'll go," said Ella, as she stumbled in her nervous haste through the litter of broken branches, and began to untether her mare.

"Hurry, dear, do!" urged Victor.

But Ella now needed no urging, and in a few minutes was in the saddle and once more guiding her trusty little animal through the bush, and as soon as she reached the open country galloped at top speed to the hut of the boundary rider, who was known on the station as Malpus Brown.

CHAPTER XVI.

A TEST OF FAITH.

“One thing accomplished is of more value than a thousand but half-accomplished. The soul that is in earnest does not stop to count the cost.”

—BYRON FANGHAM.

After a smart ride Ella Esbourne reached the boundary rider's hut, which stood just within the slip-rails at the ten-mile. The light shone from the window and the open door revealed the inside of the small slab humpy with its wide fireplace, in which a large log was burning brightly, and the kettle, hanging from a chain in the centre of the chimney was boiling merrily. The floor was beaten earth, with a few sacks thrown about to take the place of rugs. In the centre of the living room stood a home-made table, while a few roughly constructed benches, a canvas chair, several cooking utensils, and a saddle hanging from a beam, comprised the contents of the outer room. Here the occupant sat at his evening meal, evidently not long home from his rounds among the sheep. Hearing the approach of horse's hoofs, the man looked up from a book propped up against a billy-can on the table, and which he was reading while he ate, and peered out into the thickening gloom of the night. Then as the horse stopped outside the slip-rails at his door he rose from his bench and went out to ascertain who his late visitor could be. Upon discovering that it was a woman, he crossed to the rails and let them down for her, saying in his rather gruff tones—

“Good evening, Miss Ella.”

The next minute the girl had slid from her saddle and, entering the hut, dropped upon a seat, breathless and exhausted from her desperate ride, and quite unable to find her voice for a few seconds.

Malpus Brown was a most taciturn man. He was never known to speak unless it was absolutely necessary. So on this occasion he simply stood before his youthful visitor, waiting till she was ready to communicate her wants or reveal her mission there. He

was apparently between forty and forty-five years of age, with well-developed frame, athletic in build, and of more than average height. His hair was thick and dark and worn exceptionally long for a man, while it clustered over his brow in heavy loose locks that imparted a rather ferocious aspect to his face. He had a thick black beard in which were streaks of grey, that covered his face to the cheek-bones, lending a rather shaggy and unkempt appearance to this otherwise remarkable character. His eyes were deeply set, dark, and piercing, and looked from under shaggy brows that almost met over the bridge of the nose. He gave one the impression of being a very hairy man, a modern Esau. His features were, however, finely moulded and rather striking, and in his early youth he must have been extremely handsome, though his neglected appearance quite obliterated these claims, but he made rather a picturesque figure as he stood before his young mistress in an attitude of unstudied grace. He wore the usual dress of the Australian bushman; moleskin trousers, crimean shirt and belt at the waist, with sheath knife and pouch attached, leather leggings, which he had not removed since he came in, and spurs at heel.

At length Ella found her voice and burst forth excitedly—

“ Oh! we want your help, Brown. Such a dreadful accident has happened down in Forest Glade. Do come quickly, please! ”

“ What sort of an accident? Who is hurt? ” he asked.

“ One of our gentlemen visitors,” replied the still panting girl. “ We were coming home through the Glade and the storm overtook us. The lightning struck a tree. We all had a narrow escape. I don’t know how it happened, but there he is lying senseless under his dead horse. Oh! do hurry.”

“ But who is it that is injured? ” persisted the man, doggedly.

“ Oh! why, it’s Mr. Northbrook, a guest of

father's. I've left Mr. Barcombe with him till you come to help him lift the horse's body off his leg," explained Ella, speaking rapidly; then added, "Where is Sallust?"

"Gone up to the Homestead for rations" he replied, reaching down his saddle as he spoke.

"Oh! I am sorry, but we must do the best we can alone, I suppose. We shall require a lantern and a rug, and some brandy, too, I think, to help revive him," said Ella. "But please do be quick, Brown," she urged, as the man turned slowly and left the hut to saddle his horse. Out of doors his thick black brows met over his eyes as he muttered to himself—

"Northbrook! Northbrook? It surely can't be *Roger* Northbrook? No! it's not likely to be the same."

While Malpus Brown was getting his horse ready Ella busied herself in gathering together a couple of rugs and a pillow from the inner room, which she strapped swag-fashion and fastened on the front of her saddle, and was ready mounted by the time Brown appeared, leading his horse by the bridle.

"Have you got the brandy?" she queried. "Oh! and we shall want a tomahawk to cut away the timber," she added, calling after him as he re-entered the hut. All being ready at last, they started off for the Glade, Ella making the pace, which was consequently a swift one.

It was with feelings of keen relief that Victor Barcombe heard them coming, for he had sat all the time on the damp ground in the darkness of the bush, with the unconscious Roger's head supported upon his knee to ease the pressure of the broken boughs against which it had rested. When Malpus Brown examined the face of the prostrate man an exclamation fell from his lips—

"My God! it *is* the same! Can he be dead?"

This was not heard by Victor and Ella, who were busy getting the rugs and other appliances ready to

lay Roger upon when he was released from his dangerous position beneath the horse.

The experienced eye and ear of the shepherd soon discovered that Roger Northbrook still lived. Concussion of the brain, he concluded, and imparted this information to the others in tones that lacked interest, and, had a close observer been watching the man's face, they would have detected there an expression of hatred that boded ill for all the show of compassion he would have given to the injured man had he been left to himself. While engaged with Victor Barcombe in clearing away the tangle of boughs and getting the leg from under the dead horse, he appeared to lend his aid so reluctantly that Ella Esbourne lost all patience. She attributed it to what she had heard of the boundary rider's naturally morose and unsociable disposition, which was so well-known among the rest of the station hands that they had nick-named him "Surly Malpus." He had only been at "Cumbooqueepa" for that season, having been engaged by Leonard during his father's absence in Europe, but as he was such a good, reliable man at his work his other marked peculiarities were overlooked.

When Ella later saw Brown deliberately spill the brandy they were about to administer to Roger, she lost her temper and, springing to her feet, exclaimed—

"Really, Malpus Brown, I don't believe you care whether Mr. Northbrook is dead or alive, and wouldn't take the trouble to find out. You haven't a spark of pity in you. If you won't help us I'll soon get those who will."

Then, whispering something to Victor, whose answer was "The surly cur!" Ella sprang once more upon her trusty little "Flirt," and was soon well away on her night gallop to the homestead for the help they so much needed, now that they knew Mr. Northbrook, was still alive. On the way she met the young shepherd, Sallust, whom she bade hasten to the Glade with all speed and give them a hand to get the injured Roger to the hut on a bough stretcher, and she would

send help and comforts from the homestead as quickly as possible.

Arriving there, her news was the cause of great concern, for all had been most anxious about the three riders. Without delay Mr. Esbourne ordered the buggy to be got ready with appliances to render what relief was possible, till the doctor should arrive, for whom Frank was immediately despatched. Ella begged to be allowed to return with her father, but to this her mother would not consent; she could see that the girl was already overstrung and required rest, for she was wet and weary after her long drenching ride, so she was promptly ordered off to bed instead, and dosed with the ever-ready eucalyptus.

Edna promptly offered her services, which were gladly accepted by her father, for he had some experience of the skill and quiet self-possession of his eldest daughter in times of sudden sickness in the house. With white face, yet calm and strong of heart and confident in spirit, Edna took her seat in the buggy, and they drove away into the gloom of the night—drove to the place where he, whose soul had mingled with her own in holy rapture not twenty hours before, now lay in mental oblivion, or perhaps ——? Yes, she must face even that if it were the will of the Highest and best for his soul—perhaps transported far beyond her touch and sight—gone unto the Father of all souls.

That night was spent in a state of anxious watching by all at the homestead. Even the merry Amy was sobered and grave and sat like a frightened mouse by Ella's bedside, while she listened to her friend's self-reproaches over what she termed "their mad folly and caprice." It was a lesson to them both and one they never forgot, for no more miserable pair of girls then existed than were these two during the hours of suspense that were inevitable till they should receive news of Roger's condition. About dawn Leonard arrived and imparted the information that Mr. Northbrook had been found to be too badly injured to risk

his being brought from the hut to the homestead until the broken bones were set, as the tracks were in such a bad state owing to the dry weather. Mr. Esbourne had ordered them to leave him at "Honeysuckle Hut" (as the one at the ten-mile boundary was called, and where Malpus Brown was stationed). Dr. Fairbourne had seen him and would remain with the patient till the Sydney surgeon for whom he had wired would arrive, as the Wagga doctor had pronounced the case serious. It was found that Roger had sustained a compound fracture of the left thigh bone and severe concussion of the brain, and was still unconscious when Leonard left the hut.

It was about noon the following day before the two doctors met at the hut for consultation, and then it was not found possible to do more than temporarily relieve the patient till the worst of the swelling had been reduced, though the wounded head was stitched and bandaged, as it was considered possible that the patient had a chance to pull through with care and good nursing. "This latter he would ensure by sending for an experienced trained nurse himself," announced Dr. Foreland, the Sydney surgeon, who was well known and exceedingly clever in his profession.

"When can he be moved, Doctor Foreland?" enquired Mr. Esbourne.

"When?" echoed the surgeon, in unfeigned surprise. "Why, not on any account must he be stirred from this place if you want him to have a chance of his life. Here he is and here he must remain for a time at any rate, till we see how he progresses."

"But surely he cannot be properly cared for in this out-of-the-way place, nearly ten miles from the house, and without the necessary comforts, too!" expostulated the squatter.

"By no means, and on no account must Mr. Northbrook be removed from that bed over such roads as we have travelled to-day, or it is at the risk of his life. His condition, I assure you, is most critical, sir, and he may not regain consciousness for some days yet.

Till then I cannot express an opinion regarding his chances of recovery. Comforts? Well, they must be brought here to him; he cannot go to them," he concluded emphatically.

"Right, doctor!" admitted Mr. Esbourne. "Your orders shall be obeyed to the letter as far as lies in my power. Only get him round at any cost."

"We'll do that if medical skill can," asserted the surgeon. "Good nursing and unremitting attention, with his excellent constitution, ought to do it I fancy," he concluded, as he entered the outer room of the hut, where Edna was standing waiting with calm exterior but anxious eager heart. She had heard what had been said, for there was but a hessian partition between the rooms, and her heart sank when she knew that another would be deputed to nurse him back to health and strength. That, she had dared to hope, would be her privilege.

"Father, don't you think I am competent to undertake the care of Mr. Northbrook? You know that I am a good nurse—am I not?"

"Here's my daughter wanting to be appointed nurse to your patient, Doctor," remarked the squatter. "But you have decided that a trained nurse is essential in this case, I think?"

"Absolutely," affirmed the surgeon. "It is imperative, more especially where he is, so far removed from medical aid in case of an emergency." Then seeing the expression of disappointment on Edna's face, Dr. Foreland added, smiling, "Not that I do not feel sure that Miss Esbourne would prove a most excellent nurse in an ordinary case of illness, but in this matter it is the experience that is so requisite."

"I have often wished that I might have been trained as a nurse, Dr. Foreland," responded Edna. "Indeed, I think it was my true calling, had I not chosen another earlier in life, and now it is too late. But more than ever I feel capable of nursing the sick both in mind and body."

"Why now more than ever before?" asked the

surgeon, looking up at her enquiringly from under his brows, as he arranged his instruments ready to pack in his bag.

"Because I recognise the Oneness of all humanity with the One Life and Health of the Infinite; the connection of the unit with the whole; and that conscious recognition is a healing and life-giving power I am certain," she ventured quietly.

"Very likely it may be, with the assistance of science in the form of drugs and such as these" (pointing to his instruments, as he placed them in their cases), he replied shortly.

"No, it will some day even take the place of medicine and instruments, Dr. Foreland," she answered. "It is the Power which Jesus used to heal the sick and raise the dead, and that is the Power that will be the greatest rival to your profession some day."

"Indeed! And when will that day come, Miss Esbourne?"

"When mankind recognises its potency and discovers that his only true physician is within himself," said Edna calmly.

"Well, I declare!" exclaimed the surgeon, laughing. "Why, this daughter of yours, Mr. Esbourne, is a red-hot revolutionist! Here she is going to take our source of income out of our hands altogether and send us to fill the ranks of the unemployed! What do you think of it, eh?" queried Dr. Foreland, as he passed out of the hut into the open, where the squatter was waiting in the buggy to drive him back to the homestead to dinner.

"Well," responded her father, "I don't know what we should have done without you and your drugs and instruments to-day."

"Yes, the Physician *within* was nowhere without the surgeon *without*!" chuckled Dr. Foreland, placing his bag in the buggy.

"I did not mean that it was coming to pass to-day, father," protested Edna, "I am speaking of the future. The world is not ready for these things, the growth has

to be gradual ; the few have to suffer to prove what the many will eventually accept."

"Perhaps you didn't know that Edna has imbibed some very strange doctrines of late," explained the squatter, as the surgeon sprang in beside him after shaking hands with Edna. "And I fancy our friend Mr. Northbrook has been adding fuel to the flames since his arrival."

"Oh, indeed!" said the surgeon. "What are they?"

"They have something to do with these queer religious views or advanced notions which have taken hold upon some people lately," explained the squatter.

"Ah! yes, now I think of it, I believe our friend Northbrook was tainted with something of the sort when I last spoke to him—Pantheism, or something of that kind. Oh! that will soon wear off. It's catching, but not lasting nor serious." And the doctor smiled with the superior air of one who knows.

Edna, who had been back to the hut to bring out something her father had forgotten, now came up to the side of the buggy, when Dr. Foreland said—

"Well, Miss Esbourne, I'm going to leave our patient in your hands for a few hours till Dr. Fairbourne returns with the nurse and they will then take entire charge of the case. I know you will follow out my instructions implicitly and should he regain consciousness send me word at once, though I really do not expect it, nor would I be surprised if he remains as he is for a couple of days or more even—unless ——" (then he turned his head as they were about to drive off, saying mischievously—"well, unless you try some of that mystic power you were speaking about and so work a miracle! Good-bye!")

The next minute both gentlemen had driven away, leaving Edna standing there with those last words uttered by the surgeon in jest, ringing in her ears, and echoing in her heart as she retraced her steps and entered the room where Roger Northbrook lay so still and helpless.

For several minutes Edna Esbourne stood there looking down upon the white face of the unconscious man, her hands clasped before her to still the wave of deep emotion that surged through her whole being. Now that she was alone, quite alone in the presence of that still form, all the strange happenings and wonderful experiences through which their souls had passed that night in the moonlit garden flooded her mind and lifted her far above the altered conditions which now confronted her. Yes, this was a test of her faith—her love! Then her heart beat strongly, her pulses throbbed, and her breath came deeply from her heaving bosom. A strong deep desire, an intense yearning, possessed her at that moment that *she* might restore him to health and strength again. Why could she not? Why was it possible to the Great Teacher of these truths and not to His disciples? What was it she lacked that prevented her claiming the power He had promised would be given to *them* who believed in and followed Him? What but faith? Just *faith*! Of course it was, she thought, and then her countenance was illumined with a great joy. Undoubtedly He had said, "If ye have faith and *doubt not*. Oh! if she could only lay claim to that—just have the faith of a little child, perhaps—yes, perhaps she might be able to do as Dr. Foreland had suggested. What was it he had said?—"Unless you try some of that mystic Power upon him, and so work a miracle"—Oh! if she could, if she could only by her love and faith combined restore this beloved one to consciousness. What a triumph! What a victory for the truth she had learned to love! Surely the spirit had put those words into the doctor's mouth on purpose to stir her to action and prove the power of the Father to heal through His obedient children to-day, as He did through His dear Son so many centuries ago. Then there came a stillness upon Edna's soul, the tumultuous passions calmed down as though a voice had whispered, "Peace, be still. Be still and know that *I Am God!*" Then in her mind a strong resolve took root, and it was that she

would give herself up to one thing only. She would take Roger Northbrook's spirit into the presence of the Father—the Omnipresent Good, the life, health, and strength of His children as of the whole created Universe, seen and unseen. There she would do as the Master had commanded; she would knock, believing that it would be opened unto her; she would then ask, confident that she would receive that her joy might be full.

She hesitated for a moment or two before retiring into the silence of her own soul where she knew the Lord of her being was ready and willing to answer prayer, if sought in sincerity and truth—hesitated, just a moment, but that moment was one of temptation, for the thought crossed her mind—"But I am such a babe in the truth, I know so little, I am so ignorant, I may—yes, I may on that account fail."

Then immediately, like the whisper of an angel's voice in her ear, the Master's words recurred to her as uttered by Himself under similar conditions. "I thank Thee, O! Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding ones, and didst reveal them unto babes; yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in Thy sight."

The temptation passed, and, without another moment's hesitation, she seated herself by the bedside and, taking Roger's hand in hers, laid her finger upon the imperceptible pulse, and then, closing her eyes in silent concentration, entered into the secret chamber of her own being, and, shutting the doors of the five senses, prayed to her Father in secret and silence, fully believing in the intensity of her trust in that omnipotent Father's love, that He would hear her petition and reward her openly by restoring to consciousness and renewed mental and physical strength this bruised and helpless one now before His presence. For a very long time Edna sat in this holy silence, communing with her soul's divine Lord. Over an hour passed and the shadows were lengthening in the little room. She never moved, scarcely breathed: so wrapped, so engrossed

was she in the one great purpose that she had now set herself to achieve, that time was not ; to her it was as though she existed now in eternity. At length her lips moved, and at first inaudible words fell from them till, softly, on the stillness of that sick room the voice floated like the breath of a child's prayer spoken in accents of trust and confidence—

“ Father, I thank Thee that Thou hearest me, and I know that Thou wilt hear me always. O ! Righteous Father, I pray for this thy son, Roger Joshua Northbrook. Thou seest this suffering one laid low. I pray Thee to manifest Thyself through him as health, strength, consciousness. Let only the perfection of the divine man, Jesus Christ, be expressed in every atom of his being. Father, I believe that Thou hearest me, Thy handmaiden, as Thou did'st hear our elder brother Jesus. And now, O Holy Father, Thou wilt prove it, for the sake of Thine own promise and in the name of Thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.”

Then slowly rising to her feet, Edna opened her eyes and fixed them on the quiet face before her, still holding her fingers on the sick man's pulse. Drawing a deep breath, she centred all the power of her mind and the desire of her soul upon the perfection which she wished to see expressed in the body of Roger Northbrook, then in firm strong tones that vibrated with life she said—

“ Roger Northbrook, listen ! You are a perfect son of the living God, you are spiritual, free from all weakness, you are strong, well and powerful to rise above all less than thyself. You reflect only the health and perfection of your Source—Spirit. In the consciousness of the Omnipresent Spirit, your God, I claim for you life, life, *life* ? Awake, *awake* ! In the name of Jesus Christ I call you back to Life ! Roger, awake ! ”

Then, like an electric shock, Edna felt the pulse beneath her fingers quicken perceptibly, felt a tremor run through the hand that had so long lain in hers limp and lifeless, then beheld the heavy white eyelids

tremble over the shuttered orbs, and then—oh! joy unspeakable!—the eyes were slowly opened and for a few seconds fixed on vacancy, then closed wearily.

Edna still whispered the magic words, Life! Life! *life!* with all the force of her soul, and held firmly in her mind what it meant to this dear one. Again the lids were lifted slowly, and this time a long shuddering sigh escaped the lips. Once again the weary eyelids drooped, but this time lay more lightly on the pale cheeks. Edna once more repeated aloud—

“Roger, Roger! I call to the divine Lord, the Life of your own being, to the Christ of God within you, to express that life in your body. God is your Life, and not death. You must live, *live!*”

The last words fell with such emphasis and force from her white lips that it was as though she would infuse the very life of her own soul into that of the one before her. Then her faith and childlike trust received its reward. Once again, with a deeply drawn sigh that was more like a smothered moan, Roger shuddered from head to foot, and opening his eyes widely fixed them upon Edna with a half-dazed yet wholly conscious look in their depths. Then the lips moved and she saw they tried to voice her own name, but before she could wait to even hear the glad sound her heart overflowed with gratitude and deep soul joy. Falling on her knees by the bedside she cried aloud in a voice mellowed by tears and deepest emotion—

“O! Holy Father, I thank Thee, I praise Thee that Thou hast indeed heard me; that Thou hast answered my petition for this dear one’s life; that Thou hast proved Thy wondrous power and so glorified Thy holy name. Hear my prayer of thanksgiving, O my Father, as Thou didst hear my cry of entreaty! Wonderful, glorious are Thy good gifts to Thy children who trust Thee. Help me to keep my faith strong that I may henceforth go from strength to strength. That I may yet prove Thy promises more and more and manifest Thee to the world by my own life spent in Thy service. Now, O Father, give strength to this

Thy son, Roger Northbrook, whom Thou hast so wonderfully restored to conscious life. Keep him ——”

“*Ed—na !*”

The word, spoken so low that it was more like a whisper, came from the man beside her. With a start Edna sprang to her feet and, leaning over the speaker, laid her hand upon the dark hair of that bandaged head gently, and tenderly looked into the eyes that now sought hers half-questioningly, but fully conscious. Her own were misty with tears of joy and thankfulness, but she held up her hand in a warning attitude to still the words that she saw were struggling to his lips, and said with all the tenderness of a loving woman—

“Roger, beloved of my soul I thank our Father for your dear life. You are saved by the power of our God, the omnipresent life of your life. You are restored to consciousness. You will live, you must live, for remember that *God is your life !*”

Then noticing that he was still making an attempt to speak, for he whispered her name again, she said, “Hush ! be still now. I am with you and will stay with you while you sleep. Rest, dear. Sleep, my beloved.” Then she sat for a while by his side with his hand held in hers, and presently had the satisfaction of seeing him gradually sink into a calm peaceful slumber.

Stealing quietly out of the room, she summoned the man Sallust, whom they had bade remain in attendance, and ordered him to ride quickly to the homestead and inform Dr. Foreland that Mr. Northbrook had regained consciousness.

When the messenger was gone, Edna lit a lamp and turning it low, seated herself by the side of Roger, and concentrated her mind upon the thought of rest and mental restoration for the invalid, while her heart whispered—“Peace, peace ! God is your peace !”

This she held firmly in mind till she felt the faint pulse become more even, and heard his regular breathing that told her he slept calmly, quietly, safely, folded in the arms of infinite peace !

CHAPTER XVII.

NURSE MYZIA.

"Certainly the mistakes that we male and female mortals make when we have our own way might fairly raise some wonder that we are so fond of it."

—GEORGE ELIOT.

While Dr. Foreland was partaking of an early breakfast, preparatory to starting out for Honeysuckle Hut to visit his patient, the buggy arrived from the station with the hospital nurse from Sydney, who had reached Wagga-Wagga by the express that morning.

"Will you start for the Hut with the nurse immediately, Dr. Foreland? Or will you wait till Dr. Fairbourne arrives?" asked the squatter.

"Oh! immediately the nurse has had her breakfast we must get away. Leave a message for Fairbourne to follow on without delay. It is such a long drive and there is no time to be lost, as you know I must catch the afternoon train to Sydney without fail; my city patients need me," answered the surgeon, as he rose from the table.

Just then the nurse was ushered into the room and greeted by Dr. Foreland, who recognised her as one of his most skilled and reliable nurses in cases requiring special care and close attention. He then introduced Nurse Mysia Grayson to the members of the Esbourne family present at the moment, and urging her to take some breakfast, bade her be ready to start as soon as possible, and hurried away to prepare for his drive to the Hut.

Nurse Mysia Grayson was an exceedingly pretty woman, and presented a very pleasing type of the gentle sisterhood she represented. She was attired in the regulation nursing costume, which suited her admirably. But even the long enveloping cloak could not altogether hide the graceful outlines of her small yet well-proportioned figure. The tiny bonnet with its flowing brown veil sat well upon her crown of light brown hair, and the soft blue of her eyes, with their long curling lashes which veiled their brightness when

animated or hid their liquid depths when moved by sympathy with suffering or pity for pain, gave the finishing touch to a face that was naturally sweet to look upon at any time—but which wore an expression of sadness that told of sorrow and disappointment. There was also a charm in her voice and manner that would make her a welcome visitor in any sick room, for her every movement and the soft mellow tones of her voice proclaimed her to be that one creature who above all others, in sickness and health, captivates the heart and eye of a man—a gentle, sweet-faced, soft-voiced, sympathetic and truly womanly woman. All this was Nurse Mysia Grayson.

On arrival at Honeysuckle Hut, Mrs. Esbourne and Edna received the young nurse graciously. Edna was strongly impressed in her favor, and felt that Roger would be well cared for by this sweetly pretty girl, and as the two shook hands in greeting they looked into one another's eyes with a questioning gaze as if somewhere they had met before; yet in reality they were total strangers to one another. Mrs. Esbourne, who had driven over with Sallust the previous night to keep her daughter company in her lonely vigil, assured Nurse Mysia that she would see that all needed comforts were sent to the Hut from the Homestead, also that fresh food supplies should be provided daily. She was going home now to despatch the wagon with furniture and bedding and would send a good German servant girl, upon whom she could rely, to wait upon her. She regretted that it was considered necessary to nurse Mr. Northbrook there ——

"Mr. Northbrook!" ejaculated the nurse, her face losing its color momentarily and her voice trembling.

"Yes, Mr. Roger Northbrook is your patient," replied Mrs. Esbourne. "But do you know him?" she asked, noticing the agitation Nurse Mysia betrayed.

"Yes, if it be Mr. Northbrook, the author, I do," asserted Nurse Mysia, faintly.

"You have met him, then?" inquired Edna.

"I nursed him through a long illness some years ago," she replied.

"And you did not know that it was the same to whom you were coming when you arrived here, Nurse?" queried Mrs. Esbourne.

"No, I had not heard my patient's name till you mentioned it just now, madam," she returned, fidgeting with the fastening of her cuff to hide her agitation from these strangers at the news she had just received.

"What a strange coincidence, is it not, mother?" remarked Edna.

"Yes; that Nurse should not be a stranger is something for which I am thankful, seeing that she has such a serious case to take upon herself, and under these trying conditions too. I feel he will be in good hands at any rate," asserted Mrs. Esbourne, smiling gently upon the young nurse.

"Was Mr. Northbrook very ill on the last occasion when you nursed him, Miss Grayson?" enquired Edna.

"Yes, but it was a tedious illness more than a severe one," she replied. "He had an attack of malaria fever, contracted in Northern Queensland, and was ill for several months."

"And did you nurse him through it all?" she questioned.

"I did," assented Nurse Mysia, turning away to lay aside her cloak and bonnet, which she had removed preparatory to joining the doctors in the sick room.

"Then he will soon mend in your hands I am sure. Besides, how pleased he will be when he finds that it is you who have been appointed to nurse him. Indeed, I cannot tell you how glad I am that it is so." And as Edna expressed these sentiments of pleasure she looked at Nurse Mysia with a smile of trust and confidence in her dark eyes that did not find an answering one in the young nurse's blue ones, for her long lashes veiled them as she answered faintly, "Thank you." Then, wondering why this beautiful woman with her crown of silvery hair should take such a keen interest in Roger Northbrook's welfare, she asked—

"Has Mr. Northbrook been long with you—I mean staying here? I think Dr. Foreland said he was Mr. Esbourne's guest?" she spoke half-hesitatingly, and with averted face.

"Less than a couple of months," replied Edna quickly. "He only returned from an extended tour abroad the same week as he came to us. My father and brother travelled with him from America, and as he was a visitor to our station some years before, father persuaded him to come and stay over Christmas. This, though, is a most unfortunate ending to his visit."

"O-h! then Mr. Northbrook has been out of Australia?" said Nurse Mysia, with a little gasp.

"Yes. Oh yes, for over three years. He has had quite a long tour round the world lately. You did not know he was away?" responded Edna, with a slightly surprised look.

"No-o-o! That is, I have not seen him since—since his illness or shortly afterwards," she admitted faintly, though she might have added that she knew the reason of his going, though not the actual fact.

Just then the two doctors entered the little room after their consultation about the patient, and Dr. Foreland came to Edna looking very well pleased, and congratulated her warmly on what he considered her good nursing and the marked improvement in his patient's condition since the previous evening. He then asked her jokingly if she had used any of "her mystic power on him?" at which Edna smiled and, nodding her head, said quietly, "Yes, I think I did, doctor." To which little sally the nurse listened and silently drew her own conclusions.

"Now then, Nurse, if you are ready for duty we will proceed to work," announced Dr. Foreland, turning to Nurse Mysia, and without further delay she was ushered into the sick room where her patient lay. But it was not without great inward perturbation that this woman steelled herself for the ordeal which she well knew lay before her in her professional capacity.

She bit her lips and closed her hands tightly as she approached the bed where Roger Northbrook lay. Then as she beheld that loved form loom out of the semi-gloom of the darkened room her head seemed to swim and her eyes smarted for a moment. But it was only for a moment—the next she had recovered all her professional calm and self-possession, so that neither of the doctors dreamed for a minute what it cost the woman at their side to stand there apparently so still, deft and alert to all their wants, while they diagnosed the case in her presence and completed their examination. Apparently to her it was only a “case,” but in reality it was torture to her heart to have to watch every process of that surgical work while it was being done. There was one consolation only, and that was he had not yet seen her, being under the anaesthetic when she went into the room.

Two hours later the surgeons had quite finished. All instructions were given as to treatment and Nurse Mysia was left in full charge. Mrs. Esbourne and Edna returned to the homestead in the buggy with the doctors, and though Edna had volunteered to remain and help Nurse, the latter firmly though kindly declined any assistance, saying she much preferred to take entire charge of her own cases. So Edna was obliged to yield her sway to another and with a few kindly words took her leave.

When they were all gone and Nurse Mysia found herself alone with only the servant Greta in the outer skillion, or “lean-to,” which was to serve as a kitchen, she stood for a few minutes in the outer room before again entering the sick chamber, trying to gather strength and nerve herself to face the conscious gaze of the man she loved. Her mind reverted to all the hard and bitter things she had been tempted to think concerning his treatment of her during the three years that had passed since they last parted. He had passed out of her life so heartlessly, knowing, as he must have done, that she loved him; yet he had not written her even one word of sympathy or consolation; she did

not know even if he had forgiven her for not telling him that she was *another man's deserted wife*. She had so often wondered if he had really loved her as he vowed he then did. If so, would he have relinquished her so readily, and so soon forgotten her as he apparently had done, for he had been back now for some time and had never even enquired for her nor yet sought her. She remembered a certain Christmas Eve when she had been terribly tempted by love! Tempted to yield herself to him at any cost, because she had learned to love him above all men, yes, even the husband whose name she bore and who was the father of her little son!

But did he really love her? Had he ever loved her? Now, after all this weary waiting, the woman stood in close proximity to the man whom her heart had longed for, and whose face she had yearned to see—if only for one brief hour—to see it smile upon her as she had so often seen it in her dreams. Yet now that she was here and the opportunity was hers, she shrank from it and was impelled by a strong almost irresistible impulse to run away. She wondered how she could have courage to face him, how she would be able to minister unto all his wants during her course of sick nursing and to perform the many duties inseparable from her profession, without betraying her own heart or letting him know that she still cherished his image as dearest of all to her, even though, as she had confessed to him, she was the wife of another man. That was the only stipulation he had made when he had pleaded for her love—nothing else mattered, only “if you are not the wife of another.” Now he knew she was, and probably he despised her for the moral weakness she had displayed when she had let him take her in his arms and kiss her so passionately that Christmas Eve. Oh! it was torturing. But now, now she would never let him suspect that she remembered anything but that she was *another man's wife*.

Thinking thus, Nurse Mysia moved towards the room, and, entering noiselessly, stood beside the bed on which Roger Northbrook lay. He was apparently

asleep, or not quite recovered from the effects of the anaesthetic, and as she watched him the tears sprang to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks, and dropped upon the hand that lay outside the coverlid. With a quick impulse Mysia stooped and softly kissed them away, feeling that he would never know that this was her greeting to him after years of silence. But at that same moment Roger opened his eyes and with a semi-conscious gaze let them rest upon the form of the woman by his bedside. Then one word fell from his lips—only one, but it was—

“Edna!”

The hot color rushed to poor Mysia's face and neck in a crimson wave. Then she looked into the face of the man she loved and saw there the light of reason and in his eyes the love that burned with a steady flame, but—but that love was not for her now. It was not her name that had fallen from his lips, but that of another; perhaps, too, that other was one already nearer and dearer than she had been or ever could be to him. Yes, it was that tall beautiful woman, Miss Esbourne, with her crown of snowy hair. Then her love had been for nought! What cared he now that she had loved him and waited for him all these years. He had given his heart to another, and that other was one who was free to marry him, one who had everything in her favor—position, family, wealth, and freedom; one who was not a deserted wife with a little child to work for, as she was.

The thought was intolerable to her, and she felt that she would never be able to go through the long task which lay before her of nursing this man again under these new conditions. The agony already tugging at her heart-strings, tortured her beyond endurance. She was about to move away without speaking, when the voice from the bed again whispered, this time in clearer tones and with even deeper tenderness than before—

“Edna! My soul's beloved, don't leave me! Stay near me now, I need you!”

Poor Mysia could bear no more and with quick movements she slipped out of the room. Her loving gentle heart had tasted the first drop of bitterness from the cup of jealousy, and when she returned some time later it was with a very different expression on her face. She had schooled herself to assume her most professional air and voice. She purposely kept her back turned to Roger as she prepared his medicine, and it was only when she had to raise him a little to administer the dose that his eyes rested full upon her face, but she avoided his gaze and said in a voice rendered hard and tense by suppression—

“Will you try and take this, please, Mr. Northbrook?”

The voice was the talisman he needed and with a faint gasp he spoke her name. Yes, this time it certainly was—

“Mysia! Nurse Mysia!”

Then, after a short pause for breath, he added in mystified tones—

“Am I dreaming? Can it be Mysia? Mysia Grayson?”

The glass in the nurse's hands trembled visibly, but she managed to retain her self-possession admirably as she said quietly and authoritatively—

“Hush! You must not attempt to talk. The doctor's orders to that effect are imperative. Will you please drink this now?”

“But tell me where am I? Why are you here?” he persisted.

“You have had a bad accident. As to why I am here, well, it is solely in my professional capacity as your nurse. They sent to Sydney for me to come and nurse a gentleman, and that gentleman turned out to be yourself. That is the only reason why I am here, Mr. Northbrook,” she concluded.

The voice was hard and the tones strident, so different to Mysia's usual gentle accents, but Roger did not notice them then. He was striving in a dazed and puzzled way to grasp his surroundings and

reconcile his condition and her presence there with the association of other and far different ideas which were just then floating like dim spectres through his brain.

"How is it that when I last opened my eyes I saw Edna sitting there where you are now standing? Where is Edna?"

"I do not know who Edna is, Mr. Northbrook," said Mysia sternly, "unless you refer to Miss Esbourne, who was temporarily nursing you till I arrived. She has gone home some time ago. *I* am your nurse *now*, and if you will persist in talking I shall have to leave the room." Then after a slight pause and with some little bitterness in her tones Mysia added, "but if you want to get well enough to be allowed to see *Edna*, you must obey *me*."

Without another word, Roger swallowed his medicine, lay back on his pillow and closed his eyes wearily, while Nurse Mysia moved silently about the room arranging things to her liking; but she did not allow her eyes to rest upon her patient's face again. There was bitter anger and disappointment burning in her heart, the demon of jealousy had fastened his fangs there, and she allowed him to stay, fed by her own suspicions, for she was the author, though unconsciously, of her own misery.

A couple of days later Edna drove over to the hut, hoping to be allowed to see Roger for a short time, and perhaps be permitted to relieve the nurse for an hour or so; but she was rather puzzled at the change in Nurse Mysia's demeanour towards herself. It was quite different from what it had been on the day of her arrival, and this second interview effectually dispelled any hopes Edna might still have cherished of being allowed to help with the nursing of Roger Northbrook. From this time there arose a feeling of misunderstanding and reserve between herself and the young nurse, for which Edna could divine no cause.

"I suppose Mr. Northbrook was rather agreeably surprised when he saw you, Nurse? Did he recognise

you ? ” asked Edna, as she was about to take her leave of Mysia.

“ I do not think so,” answered Mysia, coldly, “ I believe he expected, or rather thought, I was someone else.”

“ Oh ! then it was a pleasant surprise for him when he discovered his mistake ! ” rejoined Edna, smilingly.

“ I am not too certain. The other person he mistook me for was someone whom he called *Edna* ! ” While she spoke she furtively watched the effects of her words upon her visitor ; only if it was verification of her jealous suspicions she was seeking they were not fulfilled, for, as a faint tinge of color mounted to Edna’s pale cheeks she said calmly—

“ That is my name, Nurse Mysia, but Mr. Northbrook is in the habit of addressing me as Miss Esbourne.”

The words were spoken in her sweetly modulated voice and without the least discomposure. There was truth in their ring, and a sympathetic tenderness in her eyes as they rested upon the face of the pretty young nurse. The look conveyed reassurance to the smarting spirit of the girl, who really bore no actual resentment towards Edna Esbourne, but she was keenly anxious to know for certain in what relationship she stood to Roger Northbrook. Until she was assured that it was no more than an ordinary friendship there would be no peace for her in his presence, for she already suspected what his feelings were towards this distinguished looking and gentle-voiced woman.

Just then Dr. Fairbourne joined them after his visit to the sick room, and Nurse Mysia turned to him, remarking—

“ A wire arrived this morning from Mr. Northbrook’s cousin, Mr. Carlyon, who is up at the Blue Mountains, and he wishes to be allowed to come up and see him. Dr. Foreland gave strict instructions he was not to see anyone nor be talked to at all. You also agree ? ”

“ Certainly, he must see no visitors for some time,”

affirmed the doctor. "It is out of the question at present, quiet and mental rest are essential."

"Does that arbitrary rule also exclude me, Dr. Fairbourne?" asked Edna, smiling.

"I am afraid it must, Miss Esbourne, under the circumstances," he answered. "You know you two have so much in common to talk about that it would be certain to agitate him were he to see you. Then the low state in which he is at present necessitates our using every precaution. By-and-bye!—by-and-bye, Miss Esbourne, when Nurse here has got him round a bit," said Dr. Fairbourne, cheerily.

"Then I must not expect to be allowed to help you in your nursing, Nurse? I had hoped I would have been of some service," ventured Edna, looking enquiringly at Mysia.

"Thank you, Miss Esbourne, but I never allow anyone to share a case with me. I am most particular in this matter, and much prefer to have my patient entirely in my own hands," responded Mysia.

"How can you get any rest or sleep, then?" inquired Edna.

"I have learned to do with very little sleep, Miss Esbourne."

"Then as I must not see Mr. Northbrook myself to-day, Nurse, may I hope you will tell him I have called and say all at the Homestead wish him a speedy recovery? We all miss him greatly—I most of all, as we had so many interesting talks together—and I do hope he will soon be better and that we may be able to take up our discussions where we broke off."

Here Edna paused, suddenly remembering *where they broke off*. It was that night in the moonlit garden, and as the recollection flashed upon her, she felt the deep thrill of soul-joy re-awaken and surge through her whole being like a strong magnetic current, and it was as though she had touched a live wire and received an electric shock.

To cover the momentary confusion, Edna turned

away towards the slip-rails, where her horse was standing, saying as she went :

" You will give him the message, will you not, Nurse ? "

" I will give him any message that is not likely to agitate or distress him in any way, Miss Esbourne," responded Mysia.

" This message I am leaving you now will certainly not do so. On the contrary, it will give him rest and peace. These are the words, Nurse : please tell him that I am realizing his oneness with the Infinite Life as the life of his life. That Life is perfect health strength and peace ; and I am claiming this Power to restore and heal him in the name of the Perfect One."

Edna spoke slowly and impressively, then added, as she paused with her hand on her horse's neck " Will you try and remember the exact words as near as possible, Nurse Mysia ? They are important and Mr. Northbrook will quite understand."

Mysia replied that she would repeat them when she considered her patient well enough to receive the message. But Edna pleaded " that Roger should hear them *to-night*, even though he were not permitted to reply to them : only to say them as she would breathe a prayer for him." Reluctantly Nurse Mysia consented, because there was no reasonable excuse for not doing so, and the next moment Edna had said good-bye and ridden away.

For several minutes Mysia stood looking after the receding horsewoman who had just given her this strange message, wondering what was the true meaning of the words she had uttered so solemnly and which she so urgently desired that Mr. Northbrook should hear that night. There must, yes, there must be some secret bond between them if she could send him a message like that and be so confident that he would understand her meaning, or there must be more in the message than the mere words conveyed. Besides, even the doctor had remarked that " they had so much in

common to talk about." Then what was this common bond that existed between them, she wondered.

Mysia knew, or thought she did, that Roger Northbrook was not what is known as religious; then what was the change that had come over him lately if a beautiful woman like Miss Esbourne could send him what Mysia understood to be a religious message? Then, in the event of such a change in him, no one but Edna Esbourne could be the cause of it, and she must have a very strong hold upon him of a religious character if not of a sentimental one. These cogitations were at this point almost verified when she recalled to her mind the words Roger had uttered when he voiced Edna's name the second time and added, "My soul's beloved!"

Now poor Mysia felt that she had solved the difficulty that beset her heart. This woman had appealed to his spiritual life, and the Roger whom she had known, with all his passionate love, was lost to her for ever. He had fallen under the charm or spell of this strangely lovely woman, and she, Mysia, would no longer have the power to interest him. The bitter tears of vexation rose to her eyes and, to hide her emotion, she stepped aside out of view of the front door of the hut. In so doing she found herself right beneath the little window of the patient's bedroom which was wreathed with wild honeysuckle (from which the hut took its name), when she heard Roger's voice saying faintly,

"Was not that Miss Esbourne who was here just now, doctor?"

"Yes, she has just left," answered Dr. Fairbourne.

"Gone! And without coming in to see me?" queried the sick man.

"Not because she did not greatly desire to do so, sir," replied the physician, "but because professional orders strictly forbid any visitors." And the doctor's tones assumed a mock gravity.

"Why! she is a physician in herself, doctor. I would rather have one of Miss Esbourne's treatments than all the medicine in the whole pharmacopoeia."

Mysia did not wait to hear any more ; it was quite enough for her already tortured heart, and as she stole away a great temptation came to her, and it was that she *would not* repeat those words which Edna had left for him.

At first she tried to put away the temptation, but the jealousy that was now gnawing at her heart was stronger than her sense of honor, and her love was on its side pleading for all these years during which it had waited so patiently, and now—now to lose him—it was too cruel, too bitter ! So with a little gulp to swallow down her rising tears, she re-entered the hut, fully resolved that she would withhold the words that Edna Esbourne had spoken. It would surely do Roger no harm if he never heard them, and she could not see what good they would do if they *were only words* and meant nothing more to him than a prayer : they could have the desired effect without his hearing them. But if—well, if they had any hidden or secret meaning that he alone would understand, then she thought by the fact of his avowed love for her and hers for him she was perfectly justified in not delivering the message, and so she withheld it.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE GREAT RESOLVE.

“ Whosoever may

Discern true ends here—shall grow pure enough

To love them—brave enough to strive for them,

And strong enough to reach them though the roads be rough ! ”

—ELIZABETH B. BROWNING.

Later that week, when Dr. Fairbourne, with Mr. Esbourne and his wife, were discussing the symptoms of Mr. Northbrook's injuries, Edna was present and listened to the conversation, which led to the subject of healing and heredity.

Dr. Fairbourne stated that there was already a great improvement in the condition of the patient, and he believed that it was now only a matter of time and careful nursing when all the minor injuries would be healed, and with the exception of the broken limb, Mr.

Northbrook would soon be on the sure road to ultimate recovery. He had evidently improved greatly under the care of the nurse, and indeed both surgeons were loud in their praise of Nurse Mysia, who had proved herself most capable to take entire charge of such a bad case and in which she had given every satisfaction.

"I don't know what there is about you women, but really when there is a bad case which requires a bit of delicate handling I always leave it to the women. We men slash and cut, but it is the after nursing that completes the cure. I think this invisible thing is sympathy: and it is like healing balm to our men patients and we doctors know it well," remarked Dr. Fairbourne.

"Perhaps that is why so many more men than women recover in hospitals," suggested Mrs. Esbourne. "I have heard that the death rate is heavier with women—apart from their weaker constitutions—than it is with men in the ordinary cases of sickness and accidents," she observed.

"Yes, I think statistics prove that it is," admitted the doctor gravely. "Still that ought not to be so, for in hospitals they all get the same care and there is no favoritism there, madam."

"Did it never occur to you medical men that if the women nurses admittedly have such a wonderful curative power upon men's diseases that it might not apply the other way about? Suppose you gave the women patients men nurses—trained male nurses—might they not have as great a power to heal women?"

There was a general laugh at the squatter's suggestion, but Dr. Fairbourne remarked, with a good-humored smile:

"Well, really, sir, I never thought of that; truly it is not a bad suggestion, especially when you come to consider that the male and female are like the positive and negative poles, that what one lacks the other supplies. Then the idea is quite feasible that the sick man draws from the opposite pole of his being the virtues necessary to build up his depleted system;

then why should not the constant attention and presence of male nurses have the same curative effect upon the sick woman? As an experiment it is worth trying I should think."

"There is one thing that would militate against your trying such a scheme, I should think," said Mrs. Esbourne.

"What is that, madam?"

"Why, social custom and a false modesty regarding male nurses for women I should say would cause an outcry."

"It is not any worse, surely, than men as physicians, my dear," interposed the squatter, "nor indeed is it one whit different, as far as I can see, than what is now becoming a recognised thing: women invading the medical professions and practising as surgeons and dentists, and indeed lawyers too. We men will soon not have a corner to ourselves, eh, doctor? What do you say to the innovation?"

"Well, I have no objection whatsoever, for I have found that women are born healers. Most cases they take in hand prove very successful, but there is only one big barrier they have to overleap, then success is theirs," the good old surgeon affirmed cheerfully.

"And what is that, sir?" asked Mr. Esbourne.

"Why, the one we mentioned before regarding nurses—just social prejudice. Most people have not sufficient confidence in woman's skill; and it is especially difficult to convince their own sex that the innovation is an improvement in their cases. Anyway, when it comes to a risky or important operation they prefer the strong hand of the male practitioner. They think they have more nerve, I suppose, and at any rate they have, up to the present, had more general experience," concluded Dr. Fairbourne, with the air of one who knew and could pass an opinion.

"It is only a matter of time when that disability will be remedied and women will be just as skilful, and perhaps more so, than men. Only give them the same monopoly in the profession that you doctors have had

for all these hundreds of years and I am sure I shall be safe in prophesying one thing," interposed Mrs. Esbourne, with keen interest expressed in voice and manner.

"What is that, may I ask, madam?" queried the physician.

"There will be no more need for doctor or surgeons," said she.

"Why?"

"Because they will have killed all the people off the face of the earth?" interrupted her husband facetiously.

"No, do not be so ridiculous, my dear," returned his wife, smilingly, "you know perfectly well what I mean: it is because they will have most effectually banished all forms of disease, and, like the great Physician, once they have healed a patient that one will never be sick nor ailing any more. Women will go to the *cause* of the disease—which is always *sin*, or a violation of the moral laws of our being—and not only tamper with the *effects*, as is now being done. When women's rule begins on every plane of life, they will teach humanity how to live clean pure lives so that sickness and disease shall no longer be the punishment for violated laws of nature as it now is. You see for a long time women have been looking at man's methods of doing things, and his numerous failures have taught her the way to success; she is not at all likely to repeat his blunder," affirmed Mrs. Esbourne, with a knowing shake of her head at both gentlemen.

"Splendid! mamma, splendid!" exclaimed Edna rising from her seat and crossing to her mother's chair, and throwing her arms caressingly around her, her face all aglow with pleasurable excitement after having listened to her mother voice the above sentiment.

"Ah! Miss Esbourne, now what do *you* say to these new notions?" said Dr. Fairbourne, hurriedly "Here is your good mother also siding against us and threatening to deprive us poor physicians of our living. What do you propose to offer us as a substitute for

earning a livelihood when by leaving us no patients to cure you have taken our profession from us ? ”

“ The same as the Man of Nazareth followed,” replied Edna calmly. “ You know when He healed the multitude He afterward taught them how to live, think and act, so that if they obeyed His instructions they sin no more, and no sin means no sickness, as mother just observed.”

“ Oh ! that is all very well in theory, but you cannot put those theories into practice nowadays,” contended the doctor, smiling at her earnestness.

“ Oh, yes we can, and the time is at hand when we will,” asserted Edna. “ We are all perfect expressions of the One Infinite Life and It is perfect Health, and health is healing, and Life is life-giving, so that everyone who lives to his or her best is a source of new life to others. The true teachings of Jesus were proved in His life. You never heard of His being sick, weak or diseased, and if He put those perfect ideas of His into daily practice and proved their power to do for Him all that He said they would do for us, then they must be just as possible to-day as they were then. We are made, as Jesus was, in the image and likeness of God, for He said ‘ Be ye perfect as your Father in Heaven is perfect,’ and had He not known it was possible He would not have given us the commandment. But we do not express our Father’s image perfectly when we show forth disease, sickness, or moral deformity of any kind.”

“ How then would you account for the presence of so much illness and sorrow in the world to-day, Miss Esbourne ? ” enquired Dr. Fairbourne, a little cynically.

“ The sins of the fathers are indeed visited upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation,” quoted Edna. “ That is, the error thoughts—born of ignorance—which we have all been thinking for ages ; the wrong, unkind or untrue words we have each and all been speaking ; the consequent evil actions which spring from these thoughts and words : these

are the sins that are the heritage of future generations. The fruit or harvest is according to the seed sown. It is not one family alone that suffers ; it is not confined to families ; for we are all so intermingled as one great family on earth that if you or I do wrong and think that it is our own affair, and there is none else who can suffer for it, we are woefully mistaken. Children yet unborn may feel the effects of our evil thoughts and ignorant actions (for if we were wise we would not do them) and they may have to suffer for our lack of knowledge. It is in the air they breathe, in the life-blood that flows through their veins, adding greater disabilities to them, who already have their own salvation to work out. Yet truly it is justice after all, for those who have not inflicted the suffering (though they are foredoomed to endure it) are as culpable as those who did the evil which created the conditions handed down to them from ancestors far removed, if they in turn continue to repeat the sins or evil doings—even in thought, as well as act—and by so doing lay up sorrow and suffering for their posterity. For we know that all the generations of the future are the posterity of the present. To live for others and to do unto others as you would be done by was the golden rule that Jesus taught ; but it as surely applies to those whom we may never see nor know, I think, as much as to those with whom we are daily coming into personal contact," she paused, and Dr. Fairbourne said :

"That is surely a big order you ask us to undertake, Miss Esbourne : to live for future generations, when we will not even know if they shall exist ? How could we carry it out ? " he asked, smiling.

"I think the old fable we used to read in our school books of the ' Wolf and the Lamb at the Stream ' will best illustrate what I wish to say," she replied gently. "It means that if we soil the waters of life by impure thoughts and actions to-day (in our time) those coming after us have to drink of that water of life and breathe the impure mental atmosphere we have

created, and be soiled mentally, or morally defiled by its impurities. Therefore, to do unto others in the true sense of the term, and as I believe Jesus meant it, is to live to day (in our generation) for the generations to come, as we (had we had the choice) would have wished the generations of the past to have lived for us, for we are really all one and the same souls, climbing a circular stairway, and what we make for others to-day we ourselves have to partake of in the future. Then it is the truest of altruism to do the best we know; to keep the life currents clean: and so charged with vitality and of such high potency that shall verily heal, help and save to the uttermost all who come to drink therefrom. We shall then indeed be imparting to all humanity as one family the gifts of God, which are knowledge, faith, purity and love. These are the perfection of the Christ and evidence the abiding Spirit of Truth and Righteousness in Mankind."

The rest of the little group were silent as Edna concluded speaking; but her father said, as he looked at her flushed face and earnest eyes which met his own with a half-shy glance, though revealing perfect confidence and love:

"Why, my dear daughter, you are becoming quite an orator. We shall have you on a platform yet, and thus taking another of man's special prerogatives away from him, I fear. Don't you think our daughter has missed her calling, doctor?" he remarked mischievously, turning to Dr. Fairbourne.

"I certainly think that, had Miss Esbourne been a man, she would have been a great success as a clergyman, and her church would never have been empty if eloquence and sincerity of purpose, as well as an unusual degree of earnestness, would go far towards filling it," rejoined the surgeon gravely, for he was deeply interested in what Edna had said.

"Do you not think, doctor, that it is more truly a woman's calling to heal the soul than a man's?" ventured Edna.

"I really don't see why there should be any

objection since she is such a splendid nurse of the body, and a certain cure for most of our ills," he admitted.

"Then the only soul-disease being ignorance, they should be better teachers and soul-healers than men, for their experience is more in the 'within' of their being than the 'without' and they would know exactly where to apply the healing balm for all heart-aches as well as moral mistakes," interposed Mrs. Esbourne.

"Yes, I daresay you are right, madam, and really I do not doubt but that they would be the very best possible clergymen—or clergywomen—we could have. They are, I should think, better fitted in every way to teach these spiritual truths than are men, and what is more, their lives would be more in harmony with their teachings than are those of the majority of men who fill our pulpits to-day. The man teaches from the head; woman would teach from the heart. And I verily believe that is just what is wanted in the world to-day—more love than lore," affirmed the physician, rising to his feet as he spoke, while his eye caught that of the Rev. Cyril Clifford, who had been seated by Gracie's couch in the far corner of the big lounge, listening attentively to this most instructive conversation.

Edna, loath to let pass the opportunity for saying more on the subject he had just touched upon, it being one that was very near her heart at this time; continued:

"Dr. Fairbourne, you have spoken truth, you have yourself voiced the teachings of Jesus there, because when we allow the law of love to hold continual sway in our lives we shall then consecrate all the powers of our mind and heart to the sole guidance of the Spirit of Truth; and this is what is meant by offering ourselves as "living sacrifices" holy (or wholly) unto the Lord. We shall then offer Him not half a self, but a complete and perfect whole; a pure and perfect soul in a purified and perfected body. That alone is our just service, and the day is coming very near when we will all do that, and there are none of us who can

help and hasten the coming of that day more than your good selves. You, who are physicians of the body, can also be healers of the soul, of which that body is but the expression, and to each one whom you treat for effects you can also point out the causes, and so enable that one to refrain from further doing of the evil which engendered the disease. Oh! what a great and noble calling is that of the physician! I almost envy you the opportunities you are privileged to enjoy as the healers of men—more especially when you know that true healing includes teaching them also, and bidding them ‘Go and sin no more.’”

When Edna concluded, she did not wait for any further comment upon her speech, but swiftly and quietly left the room, slipping through the curtain that gave access from the lounge to her own apartment. She was filled with a divine enthusiasm; a spiritual fire was burning within her breast with so much force that she felt she could have spoken for another hour upon the subject that consumed her; she wished that it could have been as her father had suggested—that she might have been addressing crowds of hungry souls instead of the critical and rather astonished little group in her father’s house.

The power of the Spirit was upon the woman and she spoke with a loosened tongue, and one which in this instance could only be silenced by escape to her own room. Once there she sank into a large chair; buried her face in her hands (for it was burning with intense fervor and spiritual excitement) and prayed that she might yet be a Teacher of the Truth to the multitudes, and that she might also, like the Master, be a Healer of their diseases. Surely as a soul’s highest aspirations are the sure prophecy of its fitness for the place it desires to fill, so shall it be with this woman.

Her whole being yearned to make these great Truths known to the world and so reveal to all other souls what was within themselves. What she had found within her own soul’s holy temple when she had by suffering, patience and endurance purified its courts,

they also should find in theirs. She had discovered it to be the dwelling place of the Lord of Hosts, whose presence shed around her the Peace and Love of the Infinite Father; Peace, that was still peace amidst endless activity and in the everyday affairs of her life; Love, that was ever and always Love (in the highest sense of the term), even when misunderstanding and discord apparently prevailed. Love was the armor that turned the edge of every weapon raised to wound or hurt: that armor that never faileth; and when clothed with which we can meet the most deadly foe!

With this purpose in view, this goal ahead, Edna Esbourne will labor and wait and live until the end is at last achieved; for she is awake to her own divinity and alive for evermore to the things of the Spirit, which are the deep Truths of her own being and reveal the great mysteries of God to the expanding soul.

"Edna, my dear, I wish to have a few minutes' talk with you." It was her mother's voice, and, looking up, Edna beheld her standing in the doorway of her room. Rising quickly Edna drew a chair forward, saying brightly—

"Well, mother darling, what is it? If I am to judge from the expression of your face it is something serious, a little lecture or something of the kind—eh! mother?" she said with a smile.

"Well, it is what you might term a 'little lecture' I ——" began her mother.

"A lecture from you, my dearest mother, is always good, and it must be something that needs amendment indeed when you make a very special point of delivering it thus."

Edna did not suppose that what her mother had to say could refer to anything but general home affairs: certainly not to the conversation of the afternoon with her father and Dr. Fairbourne. Besides, had Edna even remembered it at that moment she would never have imagined her mother's little lecture could refer to that, since neither of her parents had ever expressed disapproval of what appeared to them her decidedly

heretical views upon theological subjects. This, nevertheless, may have been due to their tender consideration for their daughter's feelings : more particularly as that daughter had been brought up from childhood to think for herself, and was now no longer a child, but a woman who had passed through the fires of deep affliction, and had experienced much of the world for herself ; consequently she was entitled to think for herself and express her own opinions as freely as she desired. Or, it may have been because Mrs. Esbourne herself was a woman of broader views than are common among her sex : especially upon such subjects as were those into which Edna had waded so deeply and about which she had just made such startling statements.

However, on this occasion Edna soon discovered that her mother took quite another attitude than that of indifference towards her daughter's advanced ideas upon religion, more especially when expressed before her guests so baldly as Edna had recently done.

" Yes, my dear, what I have to say refers to the little discussion we had in the lounge with Dr. Fairbourne, when Mr. Clifford was also present. If you will recall the subject you will recollect that the conversation turned upon religion, solely for lack of a little tact on your part. Let me say, my dear daughter, that it showed a want of good taste and was, to say the least, a breach of etiquette. Religion is ever a subject to be avoided in mixed company. You, Edna, must try and suppress your enthusiasm on these subjects in the presence of our guests and visitors. You shock people's personal and religious prejudices when you launch out into those doubtful subjects on every occasion when opportunity offers. You must remember that everyone is not as interested in the topic as yourself, Edna ; and besides, my dear, you are inclined to unconsciously adopt a dictatorial tone at such times and take upon yourself the manner of an instructor, even to those very much your seniors." Mrs. Esbourne paused, but Edna made no answer. Then her mother continued—

“Now if it were social or political reforms, or indeed anything bearing upon even the disabilities of our own sex to-day, there would be some excuse for so much intensity of feeling as you evince; and no great harm would be done. But, my dear Edna, that one subject above all others—religion! It is inexcusable; indeed, it is such a shock to the sensibilities and decorum of most persons that it should certainly be avoided in every instance, even when argued on the most solid and orthodox grounds; and still more avoided by you when you hold such very exaggerated views upon these questions. Indeed, I may say people never know what to expect from you, or what you will say next. Questions, too,” affirmed Mrs. Esbourne more severely, “that have most certainly been settled by heads far wiser than yours long ages ago. Besides even if you did feel that there was room for improvement, my child, no amount of talking or arguing on your part could ever make the slightest alteration in them, or even induce people to accept them in any other than the orthodox rendering.” Another pause—but still silence on the part of Edna, and her mother resumed in tones not quite so stern, and with some show of tenderness in her manner.

“Take my advice, Edna my child, and let these subjects alone; or if you must think upon these lines do so quietly and in your own mind. But to please me, dear, do not again voice your opinions so dogmatically before our guests, and in such a hot-headed and rather indiscriminate fashion, as you are prone to do. Religion in the abstract, Edna, is not a question for women to meddle with. Men alone, according to St. Paul, are privileged to deal with the main facts of this very vital subject, and as they have already given to us its very excellent Creeds and Doctrines in the simplest possible forms, it is our duty to obey their mandates and live up to the teachings there given; to live the Christian life to the best of our ability and not attempt to try and alter laws that are in truth as unalterable as those of the Medes and Persians. Live

your own life nobly, Edna, as you have ever striven to do, and do your whole duty to God and man. Take a due amount of interest in subjects that pertain to the enlightenment of your sex, the good of your fellow creatures and the progress of your country ; but, but," she said most impressively, as she rose to take her departure, not sorry that this unpleasant little duty was nearly over " but I beg of you, my love, to have done with these new-fangled notions that have taken such entire possession of you lately, and have even become more pronounced, I notice, since Mr. Northbrook's arrival here. Let me strongly impress upon you that whatever they may be for a man and a writer like Mr. Northbrook, they are certainly not becoming to any young woman, much less so to your father's daughter."

Mrs. Esbourne rose and gently kissed Edna's flushed cheek, saying with a faint smile : " There now, my dear, my little lecture is finished. Just think about what I have said and try and put it into practice ."

For some minutes after her mother left her, Edna sat perfectly still. She had not attempted to reply during the whole time her mother was speaking : she felt she could not. There was a sharp pain in her bosom and her heart was sore that this reproof should have come from her beloved mother : it was in fact a severe shock to Edna. She had cherished the thought that her mother secretly agreed with her advanced views though she might not care to admit it. Now she saw that her very outspokenness had been a mistake, an error due to excess of zeal, and so she had lost her one strong ally as she had supposed her mother to be. Now, the very knowledge of disapproval or even mere tolerance of her views, was a sure means of closing Edna's lips, and turning the great torrents of her life's waters back into the depths of her own soul. There then could be but one result : the channels would overflow at some period ; they could not be dammed up for ever ; for they came from the Source of all Life—the very Heart of God. They watered the

plains of her own thirsty soul, but there was more than she alone could use, and she felt that she must give it forth to others: must let numbers of the thirsty ones on life's dreary way drink of those living waters, whose healing streams flowed through her so freely. But how? That was the question that was now puzzling Edna Esbourne. Her circle at home was such a narrow one: from this hour still more narrow, since she was forbidden by her mother to speak out her thoughts upon the subjects nearest and dearest to her soul. How, she asked herself, could she find a means to give to the world what it so much needed? She was already fully aware that she could not get editors to accept articles from her pen on these topics, and that even if she published a book at her own risk, it might not succeed in reaching the hands of the ones whom she knew somewhere must be ready for the truths it revealed as she had been five years ago. This course she felt would take too long, and at that time was too uncertain, for her ardent soul was now yearning to pour forth its treasures of heaven to the multitudes, as did Jesus when He taught those same Truths of Being on the hillsides of Judea. Yes, that was how she desired to teach: just to sit down somewhere and gather the people around her—anyone and everyone who would come—and tell them what she knew about this saving science; to reveal how the power of Thought in their own beings would and could heal and save them from so much of the misery they were groaning under to-day.

How could she ever hope to be able to do that? She who was such an important factor in her father's home? She who had loved ones to consider and then social position to study? What a terrible shock it would be to them all if she attempted to put her idea into practice: if she dared to go out into the world and preach and teach these grand principles of Life, this message of true salvation, to the people of to-day, just as did Jesus of Nazareth in his day and generation. Then she remembered that when Jesus was doing his

great work in the cities of Jerusalem, his own brethren believed him not and thought him mad. Might it not be so in her own case: those who knew her best might give no credence to her message of love, and yet the *multitudes might listen to her gladly*. She had not the slightest idea how and where it would be possible for her to do what she dared to contemplate in these modern times. She only knew that her whole soul yearned for expression, and that some channel must be opened for her somewhere—somehow. But where and how? That was what she asked, now that the conviction had become so strong upon her that “she must go forth and teach.”

Rising from her seat, Edna went into her own room and took down a book from the shelves where the volumes lent her by Roger Northbrook were carefully treasured. She already knew most of them almost by heart. The book she selected was the product of one of the most spiritual minds in the Science, entitled, “Ideal Suggestion,” by Henry Wood. The page she opened was one on which the words in large type filled the whole page, and acted like Mental Photography upon her brain, standing out thus:

“I AM PART OF A GREAT WHOLE.”

On the opposite page she read the words there written:

“HUMANITY IS ONE. I am living and loving, not for myself but for the race. If I rise I help to lift all about me and if I fall I drag others down. Loving thought sent out has a positive healing influence both on sender and recipient. We live the life of humanity—others in us and we in them. We cannot be saved disconnected from relations. Our highest privilege and office is to be channels through which the divine life shall flow out to invigorate and inspire. The essence of salvation and true healing is the death of selfishness. The soul-currents do not course from within outwards, they sink in a deadly vortex. A Son of God is one who breaks the chains of captives, opens prison doors, and proclaims freedom. Giving out, or

ministration, is the greatest and highest law, divine and human. Simple altruism sometimes heals, because it lifts the consciousness from the lower inharmonious self and turns it outwards and upwards. Thought sent out in loving waves never returns void. The race is one, and all lines of relationship converge in God. I heal and am healed."

Edna laid the book open on her lap and sat for some time musing on the words, imprinting their true meaning upon her mind, and drinking in their strong helpful ideas to refresh her hungry heart. At length she rose, determined that she would obey the call of the Spirit; she would do that which she now knew was God's will expressing Itself through her: that which was indeed her Father's business, as the Master called it. Yes, she would go forth into the world and there try to teach and preach this new gospel of peace and Love to all mankind. She would not be in any unseemly hurry, but just wait patiently till the way was prepared for her, and the door was opened by her Heavenly Father's hand. She was confident that it would be done and also that he would not ask her to do anything that was contrary to love and her duty at home; nothing that would give unnecessary pain and distress to those whom she loved and who ever loved and cherished her. She had prayed for help and guidance to obey the Voice that had spoken to her soul, and she would now "trust in the Lord and wait patiently for Him and He would bring it to pass."

Yes, and in the meantime she must fit herself for her mission. She would live the soul-life quietly and earnestly, developing her spiritual attributes by meditation and daily concentration in the Silence, and so prepare the way for the promised gift of the spirit with the power and wisdom of God. She would also continue to apply her newly discovered healing gift to raise her beloved Gracie once more into health and strength. She believed that "with the Lord all things are possible," and why not this, then? She would exert

her best endeavors to achieve this much-desired end, and even if it should take long months of patient treatments and steady unwavering faith in the Spoken Word of Truth, she would persevere, believing that what she asked would be eventually given her according to her faith and expectation of the gift. If she believed anything that Jesus said, she must certainly believe those words of his : " And all things *whatsoever* ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive," and again : " If two of you shall agree on earth as touching *anything* that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father."

CHAPTER XIX.

IS GOD DEAD ?

" Would you see God ? Look about you among the true, the loving hearts of His children, and in every trait of holiness and benevolence, there see divinity freshly incarnating Itself, to teach new lessons of goodness, righteousness and love to all the Sons of Men."

—JOSEPH MAY.

Since his arrival at " Cumbooquepa," the Rev. Cyril Clifford had become deeply interested in the squatter's youngest daughter. Gracie's very helplessness appealed to him ; there was something so natural, fresh and sweet about her, and her quaint sayings which savored of such deep religious fervor that quite won his heart ; so that she was indeed a study to the young clergyman in more ways than one. This religion of Gracie's was the truest kind of religion though he did not then recognise that it differed greatly from the orthodox teachings : it was only that she expressed herself differently. It was a religion of the heart : therefore the religion of Jesus ; the perfect expression of perfect Love which reveals itself as consistent worship for all that is highest, best, noblest and most beautiful in nature and in humanity. To Grace Esbourne it was the very incense of her soul ; it floated into the atmosphere around her with a sweet perfume that was felt more as an invisible presence

than an actual delight of the senses. Just as the rose sheds her perfume from the invisible chalice of her heart, so are we conscious of her proximity, though we may not see her lovely form nor touch her velvety petals. Such was the effect of the unfolding of the pure young soul upon those who came in contact with the little invalid.

Since his last conversation with Edna Esbourne, the Rev. Cyril's mind had been much disturbed ; and, though he felt it his duty, as an ordained minister of the Gospel, to endeavor to put her on " the right track again," and so bring her safely back into the fold of the Church, he was still conscious of something within himself which prevented his opening up the questions which she had discussed so ably in the garden the evening prior to Mr. Northbrook's accident.

The familiarity with which she handled the subjects greatly astonished the young Englishman, and made his college education pale before her innate wisdom ; his erudition even seemed weak and lifeless beside the enthusiasm and vigor with which Edna uttered her views upon these vital subjects. It was certainly a revelation to the young man and caused him some uneasiness of mind regarding the doctrines which he had been pledged to teach as being unassailable. He even found himself wondering if there were not something wanting ; did it not lack the one thing needful—LIFE ? This it was that he recognised in every word, look and gesture of Edna's : which was so sadly lacking in his own ; for he would never willingly discuss religious matters unless called upon professionally to do so. But Edna Esbourne was bubbling over with it. Every word she uttered was resonant with force and feeling ; they were words of Life, he had to admit, and " yes "—still more reluctantly.. " yes, *they were Truth !* "

At first Cyril would not allow himself to admit the latter ; but dutifully sought his Bible and prayer book, believing that from their authorised teachings he could easily refute all her arguments. But much to his

surprise he found it quite impossible. He certainly did not understand them to mean what she read into them, though he was still unable to prove her in error. Then for the first time he saw for himself the truth of the statement that "The Bible is all things to all men ; and every man can find there that which he goes a-seeking for." Cyril Clifford had yet to learn that "the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth Life."

Such being his mental and spiritual attitude, he did not again hasten to court a passage-at-arms with Edna Esbourne : not at all events till he should feel more fitted by contemplation and conviction to meet her on more equal grounds.

He however sought Gracie's company more than usual, partly from choice and partly because his health precluded his going out of doors during the severe heat which was then prevailing. When he had an opportunity he would sit by Gracie's couch and encourage her to talk about those subjects which he knew she and Edna shared, and induce her to impart some of her strange ideas to him. He soon found that Grace did not require much encouragement ; she was overflowing with a mystical lore that was astonishing in a girl of her age.

The Rev. Cyril had already taken a very real interest in Gracie's poetic talent ; and he soon discovered that there was much real merit in her lines, especially from one so young and so partially educated as she—for her affliction had limited her education to that which a governess could impart to her when she had been able to study, and which her mother and Edna occasionally continued after Miss Burton had left. Cyril, however, had offered to give Gracie the benefit of his own knowledge of the rules of verse, and the girl gladly availed herself of the welcome instruction. Thus she began to watch for his daily coming and soon a confidence sprang up between them which proved both beneficial and instructive.

On one occasion, when they had been discussing

the metre of a verse in one of Gracie's latest compositions, Cyril showed her where the balance of the lines were at fault and required a little reconstruction, though he admitted the idea was perfect.

"Yes, yes, Cyril, I see how it is," she cried. "It is like a lovely soul in a dwarfed and twisted body. Isn't it?" He smiled but did not answer, then she continued, "Now I, as the Thinker or Creator of this thought must use my creative power to build up a temple of words around my newly-created idea—my mental baby—which shall be worthy of the dweller therein. My idea, which you say is very good, is the soul of the verse; and the faulty words in which I have clothed it constitute the body or temple in which it dwells. Now what I have to do is to make the temple fit for the soul to dwell in. Is that not it?" she queried.

"Yes," he answered, smiling at her queer fancies, "if that is the best way you grasp it. I think you ought to succeed in making the temple perfect."

"Well, you know that is just what God is doing with us—or perhaps I should say what God has given man the power to do for himself by Thought: he has just to build by good and right thinking as beautiful a house or body for his soul to dwell in as his mind can possibly conceive. The more beautiful his idea is, the more perfect will the temple be: just as my rearranged words will make the verse fitted for the idea I wish to express through it. Yes, that's just it," she concluded, with a wise little nod of her curly head.

"Why, you would lead one to suppose that a man could create his own body?" remarked Cyril, "you know, Gracie, that is quite impossible."

"No, I don't know that it is impossible at all," she returned. "I think it is quite probable that we shall some day be able to consciously make ourselves into whatever form we desire: we do it now without knowing. You know, Cyril, our bodies are the 'houses not made with hands,' but made by the power of Thought."

"Then why are you lying helpless here? Why —," he paused and flushed hotly, feeling that he had inadvertently trodden on delicate ground, but Gracie only smiled and said rather sadly:

"Ah! yes, why? That is what Edna and I both ask ourselves. Yet we do think some day, when we know more about this New Truth, we shall find the secret that will teach me how to build my frail body into a perfect temple for my soul to dwell in. We do not know enough about it yet, but Edna says she means to pray over it and find out," asserted Gracie confidently.

"Why, that is out of the question," rejoined Cyril. "You cannot mean that Miss Esbourne believes she can heal your spine by the power of her thoughts?"

"We do not say we can yet," admitted Gracie, "but Edna had it revealed to her one night and she believes that it is possible for me to be restored to perfect health and strength."

"But that would be going against the will of God persisted the young clergyman, in shocked tones.

"Would it?" questioned Gracie, smiling. "Then do you mean to say that God can be more cruel than my own father, that He should afflict me like this for nothing that I have ever done in my life?"

"It might be for some good purpose that you cannot see just now, you know, Gracie," he suggested.

"Even so and granting that it is. I do not think it can be God's will that His beautiful Spirit of Life should dwell in a weak and helpless body, any more than I wish my beautiful idea to be enclosed in those faulty lines of verse. God wants perfection, absolute perfection in every part of His universe, and as I am a part of His great Plan, I too must be perfect in every part. Besides, if God sends all the sickness and deformity into the world and you believe that Jesus Christ was God's Son, can you tell me why He went about deliberately undoing His Father's work by healing the sick and raising the dead?"

"Oh! that is a very different matter," answered

Cyril, gravely. "Besides, all power was given unto Him in heaven and on earth."

"I do not think that God gave Jesus any more than He has given to each one of us His brethren; only that Jesus used it and made His portion equal ten talents and we bury ours in a napkin. So that is why we die, or, like the unfaithful steward, are cast into outer darkness, while our portion is given to another," said Gracie, in earnest eager tones.

"Then you would infer that man is equal with Jesus Christ," questioned Cyril, surprised at her statements.

"Well, I think it must be so, because He said Himself that His Father was our Father, and surely that makes us all alike, but He was the eldest Son. You see I consider that my father is just as much mine as He is Edna's or Leonard's, although they are all older than I, yet I am sure my father loves me just as much as he loves them ——"

"I should just imagine he does, little witch," said a deep voice behind her, and a pair of arms enfolded her curly head as her father's bronzed face bent over and kissed her cheek.

"What is she talking about, Clifford? Giving you one of her sermons, eh? Well, they are not bad, and there are some things in them that would do a power of good to people if they could be induced to listen to such teaching. Eh! Fairy?" he cried, mischievously pinching her chin as he spoke.

"I agree with you, sir," replied Cyril, "yet you must admit they are very unorthodox."

"Unorthodox be bothered!" ejaculated the squatter. "What does it matter so that they be good and right? What does a thirsty man care whether the water given him to quench his thirst be handed to him in an earthenware jug or a silver bowl? That's the way with religion to-day. We want it pure and unadulterated and stripped of all creeds and dogmas. Something practical and tangible, that will heal the body as well as the soul; good for this world we know

about, as well as the one we don't. I don't bother much about these matters myself," added Mr. Esbourne, "but I see room for great improvement ; and I hope the younger generation of clergymen, like yourself, will teach the people how to live instead of how to die."

"Does not the religion of Christ as taught by the Church do that already, sir ?" asked Cyril.

"Honestly now, Mr. Clifford, do you think it does yourself ? Do you know of any dead which have been raised, or any diseases cured by its power ? Are not its pastors and teachers dying to-day as they have always died, and will still continue to die, while they insist upon neglecting the way to live ? I for one cannot understand the reason for our existence here if we are to withdraw all our interest in it for the sake of an imaginary one beyond the clouds. In my opinion the best preparation for the life to come (if there be one) is to make the best use of this one," affirmed the squatter, as he moved away from Gracie's couch.

"Why ! father, that's just what Cyril and I have been talking about, and now you come and break up my sermon to make one of your own," interposed Gracie, with a comical grimace at her offending parent.

"Oh ! indeed, did I, Miss Orator ?" he cried, laughing as he left them. "There then, I'll leave you the platform, and I hope that Cyril will be edified by the discourse" ; and then he disappeared round the corner of the verandah.

"You all seem to be tainted with heresy. Why, even your father has a touch of it, I think," observed the young clergyman, with a puzzled frown.

"Oh ! yes," she said laughingly, "we are all growing out of our swaddling clothes here in Australia. You grow very slowly in England, I fear. But then it takes the younger children less time to learn to walk than the elder ones. They are generally more precocious ; so America and Australia are outstripping old England in the matter of mental and spiritual growth."

"Why ! whoever has been teaching you such

things, Gracie ? ” he cried gravely, looking at the child with her blue eyes twinkling with amusement at her own quaint thoughts.

“ Why ! only Edna, of course—and—and my Spirit Teacher who tells me things in my visions,” she replied gravely.

“ And do you imagine all these strange ideas are true because they come to you in visions or dreams ? I should think that was the very reason why you should doubt their reality,” observed Cyril.

“ Well, I once read these words in a book : ‘ There is an ear that hears not what men say, but hears what they do not say ’ ; so I think, too, there is an eye that sees not what others see, but sees what they do not see,” responded Gracie seriously. “ Now, Cyril, that is exactly what I do in my so-called visions. I think it is the Voice of my Higher Self—the Lord—who speaks to me and shows me these things.”

“ You speak of your Higher Self and name it ‘ the Lord.’ How can you do that when there is only one Lord, and He is the Lord Jesus Christ ? ” questioned Cyril in sterner tones.

“ Yes, I know, and that same Lord Jesus Christ is within every one of us. He was the example of what we may become. He is the likeness to which we all must come at some time in our soul life,” explained Gracie. “ Edna says that the meaning of God resting on the Sabbath or Seventh Day means that God handed over the government to the Lord or Spiritual Man, because He gave the power of creating to man. Now man may use the power of the Word—or true Thought—to finish the work which the Father-God began, and so make himself perfect as He is perfect.”

“ But that can never be done by a mortal man. The creature cannot be like the Creator,” expostulated the Rev. Cyril.

“ Then why did Jesus tell us to be ‘ Perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect ’ ? ” she asked.

“ He meant that we were to try and be as perfect

as we could by living good lives here, then our reward would be in heaven."

"Well, He never *said* that," protested Gracie "And I have never read anywhere in the Bible that that is what He meant. Jesus always said just what He meant. He meant we were to be perfect now as He was; just here in this life."

"How can you or Miss Esbourne expect to become like Jesus when neither of you believe the doctrines of the salvation He taught and gave to His Church?" contended Cyril.

"I think that Jesus went to Church only to teach; and He certainly did not give the Church anything which He withheld from His disciples and the multitudes. He gave His teachings free to all those who had ears and would hear. His own words told us that we have a Church: a very holy of holies, in our own souls, where Edna and I best love to worship the Father. The way to be perfect as He was is just by thinking perfectly good pure thoughts in our hearts, and they will soon show themselves in our bodies. You know He also told us to love our neighbors and also our enemies; and I try to obey Him by just loving everybody," asserted the young girl.

"Oh! do you?" he queried, laughing, "and pray, does that also include me, Gracie?"

"Why, of course it does, else how could I say truly, as I do every morning and night, 'Dear Everybody, I love you'?"

"But that is very hard to say, and I am afraid to most people quite impossible. Anyway, I hardly think I could say it with perfect verity," he remarked smiling.

"Couldn't you? And you one of His followers too! Well, you must try and learn to do so."

"It would be easy if they were all like yourself," he ventured. "And when you said just now you were scattering your love to 'dear everybody,' I wished that I might also be a 'dear somebody' and so get a special share of that large love order." As Cyril

spoke he toyed with one of her long fair curls that lay on the pillow near his hand. Then, catching sight of the flush that rose to her cheek and the reproachful look in her eyes, added hastily: "But tell me, Gracie, how it is possible for you to say you love everybody, and why?"

"Why?" she echoed in surprise. "Why, because God loves them and we are all one family in Him. Does He not love all His own Creation?"

"Yes, but that's a very different thing; God is Love and is Omnipotent. You are not God," he protested.

"No," she admitted, "but I am God's Expression of Himself, and if God can love everyone, nice and nasty, good and bad alike, why should not we? God, too, can only love through us, through everyone of His creatures, and everyone who loves His fellow creatures—his neighbor as himself—as Jesus taught we were to do, is giving forth God's love to all the world."

"You say you are God's Expression of Himself. What do you mean by that?" he questioned. "I mean how do you understand it in your way of thinking?"

"Well, I don't know that my way of thinking is any different from other people's," she replied, laughing. "Of course, I think as I feel within myself, not as I am told by others, though I understand and believe what Edna tells me. She just thinks out for herself alone in quietness, but my best thoughts come to me in my visions. I see them all like a lovely picture, only I cannot say them in words like Edna does—I *just feel!*" Gracie paused a moment and then said, with a quick flash of inspiration: "Why, Cyril, there is exactly the idea I want to help me explain to you what I mean by being an Expression of God! You see, I have an idea which I know is very beautiful, then I desire to express it, and I do so by my words or pen and through my verses; but when expressed it is not nearly so perfect as my original conception; it falls short in every way. Now don't you think that is

what God feels about His Creation—Mankind? He knows His idea about Man is just perfect—as perfect as Himself—but Man fails to grasp that idea and so does not express that perfection within himself. But Man will, some day, as Jesus did. Just as the acorn in time expresses all it possesses within itself and reveals the fully developed oak tree, so by the use of the Power of Thought which is entrusted to Man, and which is like the seed within him, Man will become just as perfect because he is the idea of God ; and God's ideas must be perfect as He is Himself. Don't you think so, Cyril ? ” she asked, wistfully looking up into his face with her great expressive eyes that revealed the pure depths of a very beautiful soul which, though so restricted in its physical range was yet limitless in its mental and spiritual possibilities. This strangely developed child might really call the Universe her home, for she seemed to roam at will in its Infinite realms of space and to learn from invisible teachers its great and wonderful mysteries.

“ Well, what I really think is that you are the most remarkable little creature I have ever met,” returned Cyril, smiling. “ I wonder where you get your strange fancies from ? Who gives you so much mystical lore as you reveal ? I do not know how it can all be contained in that curly head ! ” he said, teasingly.

“ Why should you ask ? Does it not say that He reveals to babes what He hides from the wise ? I am so glad to be one of the babes instead of one of the world's wise ones,” asserted Gracie.

“ Do you never doubt the truth of these visions of yours ? ”

“ Why should I ? The priests and prophets never doubted the visions they saw in the olden days, did they ? ” she asked.

“ No, because they were given by divine inspiration,” he said.

“ And what is there to prove that these lovely

visions I get—and some which Edna has had, too—are not given by Divine Inspiration ? ”

“ You must remember that those were given in Bible times, and were special revelations from God to guide Man in his spiritual journey to heaven,” rejoined Cyril. “ That was when God walked and talked with the holy men of old.”

“ Then, as there apparently are no holy men for God to talk to in these days, do you think that God must now be dead ? ” asked Gracie, with a faint smile hovering round the corners of her mouth.

“ Gracie, what a strange question to ask ! ” exclaimed the Rev. Cyril, his face showing the shock her words had given him.

“ Well, He must be if He never speaks to us now ; and if He is never heard of nor seen by any man on earth as He was once said to have been, that is what we conclude about any other human being. Now, Cyril, what proof can you give me that God is still alive ? ” she persisted, looking gravely into his face.

“ We know that He is, because it states in the Bible that He is not a God of the dead, but of the living,” he responded.

“ Ah ! that is just it ! ” she ejaculated, eagerly. “ He is, as you say, not a God of the dead, but of the living. Tell me, Cyril, do you consider we—you and I—are living now ? ”

“ Yes, of course we are. At any rate I know I am very much alive, and glad to be so, I assure you,” he answered, laughing at her queer question.

“ Then tell me, is God your God ? ” she pursued.

“ Certainly, I believe that He is, as He is also the God of the whole earth, otherwise I would not be a clergyman,” he asserted.

“ Well, if God is alive, and you also are alive—alive in soul as well as body—and He is your God ; and you are a Man of God, as all clergymen are,” she interpolated, “ then Cyril, why does He not speak to you as He did to the holy men of old ? ”

“ He does speak to us through the voice of the

holy apostles, and in the words which fell from the lips of His Son, Jesus Christ ; we must believe and listen to *them* now," he replied seriously.

" Well, and what have we done (you for instance, who have given yourself up to Holy Orders) that the living God should not speak to you to-day ? " urged Gracie.

" We are not worthy for Him to communicate direct with us : He has spoken to us through the voice of Jesus, and that is sufficient if we listen to and believe and follow His teachings."

" Well, I should think that if the sacrifice Jesus made was wholly accepted by God, then we ought to be worthy or else it was of no effect. But anyway, after all these hundreds of years of absolute silence on the part of God towards Man, surely we are justified in thinking that He *must be dead*," persisted Grace. " Now you, who are in the Church, state that He has never spoken direct to you or to anyone else that you know since Jesus went away ; then the Church tells us that we have to die, and go to Heaven to see God ; so that makes the words you have spoken about His being a God of the living quite wrong, because if we are considered to be alive and we only see Him after the process we call death, then He must be a God of the dead. We who are said to be alive can neither know, see, hear, nor speak to Him, it seems," she insisted.

" Oh ! yes, we can by prayer," asserted the young clergyman.

" Yes, I know, but then we have no *positive* proof, *living* proof, that He is listening out of that place where all the dead have gone," objected Gracie.

" But the Bible states that He does hear and answers prayer," contended Cyril, looking at her reproachfully as he spoke.

" Yes, I know all that," she assented, with a little nod of her head, " but we are talking now about God ever speaking *to us*, not about *our* speaking *to God*," she insisted.

"It is very much the same, is it not?" he queried, "If you believe He is there to be spoken to, you can also believe that He listens and answers in His own way and time," argued Cyril.

"Now how can that be? For instance, just suppose that I sat here talking to you for hours, and you never once came near me nor even looked at me, let alone answered my remarks or questions; don't you think I should soon begin to wonder if you existed at all?"

"Yes, in the case of mortals it might be so, but God is a Spirit ——" he began.

"No, Cyril, that is wrong," interposed Gracie: "*God is Spirit*, not *is a Spirit*; or, better still, we should say Spirit is God. Edna says that is the better expression and more all-embracing to include Omnipresence," Grace declared before he could finish.

"That to my mind does not seem reverent," he stated.

"No, perhaps not; but it is really only custom, I think. You know that God was never called the 'Heavenly Father' till Jesus came to tell us who He was, and in what relationship He stood to us," returned the girl. "But really it is all rather puzzling when you try to make the old teaching fit the new illumination. I think that is what Jesus meant when He said we were not to put 'new wine into old bottles,' and I think we had better not try, Cyril." As she spoke she leaned back upon her cushions with a sigh as though she felt the weight of the old doctrines weighing too heavily upon her youthful shoulders.

"Well, let me advise you, Gracie, to leave all these puzzling questions alone. They are too vast and far too abstruse for your pretty head; just leave them to older and wiser minds than either yours or mine; those who have worked out all these problems for us long ages ago. We are just to believe what is taught by the Church, for it knows what is best for our spiritual needs," and the Rev. Cyril Clifford tendered this advice in his best clerical style and admonitory tones.

" Ah ! but that's just it," sighed Gracie. " You see, Cyril, my trouble is like Edna's. I cannot take the spiritual food that is offered to me ready cut and dried—just like stale bread ; I like a fresh slice of a new loaf every day ; not what someone else has cut and left. And for our drink we want to go straight to the Fountain Head and draw for ourselves the living waters ; then I know and feel that I am drinking for ever from the Soul of God. Now, I suppose I'll shock you more than ever, Cyril," she added, " for I do draw upon my own living waters, and so does my sister. I know this for certain ; and if God does not speak to you or to any of the clergymen of the Church to-day, then I am just positive that He does speak to me and I am taught all my most wonderful soul-lessons by Himself," she asserted. .

" Of course, I understand you to mean that you consider those so-called visions are sent you from Heaven, and that God sends His angels to instruct you in the things of the Spirit. I can believe that is possible, though yours is a rare case, and you are highly favored as were the holy women of old," Cyril conceded in rather dubious tones.

" No, I do not think that I am any more favored than all might be if they would but live true and holy lives ; then God would speak to all His children, and His ' tabernacle would be with men.' Oh ! Cyril, how glorious that would be, would it not ? I do hope that when you go out to preach the Gospel, that you will teach all your parishioners to first live clean lives in thought as well as action, because if they do, then it will hasten the time when God will come and live amongst us : here on this beautiful earth, the Garden of Eden. Then we each shall see Him with our fleshly eyes as well as with our spiritual ; for we shall see Him in each other, as well as in ourselves, revealed. Then will the Kingdom of Heaven indeed be come and Christ's reign be in the hearts of all mankind : Peace on earth and Heaven combined for ever."

While speaking thus, Gracie had clasped her hands

together and was gazing earnestly into the face of the young clergyman with a wistful yearning in her great blue eyes, in which he saw the moisture of deep emotion: the hunger for the realization of her heart's desire, "the Coming of the Kingdom of Love upon earth." The expression of her fair spirituelle face resembled that of a pictured angel, and as he watched Cyril Clifford was filled with a sweet compassion, a tender sympathy for this beautiful girl such as drew his very heart to his throat. Then he bent his head and caught the little clasped hands in both his own and, drawing them to his lips, kissed them reverently, saying solemnly in reply to her admonition :

"Yes, little Gracie, I promise you that I will teach and preach only Jesus Christ and Him crucified, and the Coming of His Kingdom upon earth, first for His sake and the world's, and also for yours."

"I don't want you to do it so much because I asked you, Cyril. I want it because of the joy it will bring to all people," she replied, gently drawing her hands from his clasp.

"Cyril, tell me, do you really and truly believe that Jesus Christ Himself is coming back again to earth?" she asked gravely.

"I believe what the Bible tells us about it, and that says He will come again and every eye shall see Him," rejoined Cyril.

"But you know that was said nearly 2,000 years ago, and He has not come in that way yet. Besides, many millions of people have passed out of this life and have not consciously seen Him come; how, then, will they know that He has really come?" she urged.

"Those that sleep shall arise from the grave and meet the Lord in the air," asserted the young man.

"Oh! but there are thousands who are not in graves and as many more who have died and never even heard of Jesus Christ: who would not understand who He was even if He told them Himself, any more than I could understand the principles of Astronomy if I had never heard there was such a science. Now

do you know how I believe He will come so that every eye shall see Him ? ”

The Rev. Cyril shook his head as if he considered this child's questions worse than any examination he had ever had to pass at college ; but he also felt that he could not lightly dismiss the subject she was then discussing, for his profession as a minister of the Gospel made it incumbent upon him to reply to her ; though the task was worse than the preparation of a first sermon. Grace then continued :

“ Well, I think He will first come into our hearts, consciously, by our living the same life as He did when He was on earth. We shall develop the same nature, and the perfection of Jesus in us will reveal to us the Christ in ourselves : Who is the only Son of God—that is the *only* Son God can see or recognise as His Son for only Christ can be God's, not anything less than Christ—God's Best. Then is this Son born in us and the Father of Jesus Christ is our Father, because we have come into at-one-ment with Him. Then we know whose offspring we are, as Jesus did : so we recognise our divinity and claim our birthright. Then, of course, as each and every one of us come into this stage of growth we do see Christ come in the flesh—into our flesh—and our eyes behold Him. Because as He, the perfect One, comes to each and all of us at some time in our soul's unfoldment, every eye shall see Him, for they shall see Him in themselves as they saw Him in Jesus in Bible days, who is the Elder Brother of God's family of Christs.”

“ You would infer, then that Christ was not one person, the Lord Jesus Christ ? ” asked Cyril dubiously

“ I do not think that God's Christ could be contained in One individual only and alone ; no, not any more than God, the Omnipresent Spirit of Life, could be only one mighty glorified Man and still be what we understand as Omnipresence. But my idea of Christ is one I have thought out myself from ideas I got in one of my visions long ago. It is that Christ is the Universal Spirit of Love in the hearts of all

mankind ; and as that Love is more and more perfectly expressed by each person to all humanity, in like manner as Jesus expressed it, then Christ is manifested to us in our flesh and to the world. Just the same as the more the spirit of life, wisdom and goodness is expressed in the world, the more God the Creator is revealed to His creatures," affirmed Gracie.

"Then you mean to say that greater love, justice, life, wisdom and goodness revealed to the world will bring about the kingdom of Christ upon earth? Not the coming of a personal Christ in the clouds with all His holy angels? How are you going to reconcile that statement with your universal idea?" inquired Cyril.

"I certainly believe the personal Jesus will also come as the Bible states, but in the clouds ——," here Gracie paused and knit her brows thoughtfully, while there stole into her eyes an expression as of one who is listening to a half-forgotten thought. Presently she said softly, "I think that reference to the clouds means the clouds of ignorance, uncertainty, doubt; the clouds of sense consciousness which envelope our minds till we see the light of God's Truth shining through the mists, then the veil is rent in twain and we see clearly that Christ is first the spirit of truth in our own souls; and all the holy angels are the true and pure thoughts that always surround the Truth. You see, God being Spirit speaks only to spiritual beings, not to material bodies; and as we are spirits manifesting in flesh, it is not to these bodies, or garments of flesh, that Christ will appear unto; but to the One Spirit of all Life and Truth that dwells therein, and our purified souls are Its Temple—The Church—because all Spirit is God, whether it is in the Universe, in Christ, or in us. Therefore till Christ has come to us in this manner as souls we cannot see our Lord Jesus Christ and His hosts of holy angels."

Gracie Esbourne ceased speaking and at the same moment Edna appeared from behind the invalid couch, where she had been standing listening to her

little sister's words ; and, throwing her arms around Gracie, she exclaimed in eager, glad tones :

" My darling, my wonderful little sister, what a beautiful full thought ! Why, do you know you have voiced a great mystery ? Where did you get the idea you have expressed so beautifully ? " she asked, while Cyril Clifford sat silently watching this little scene with keen interest : his own soul filled and stirred by the words of Gracie, and his mind greatly impressed by the very evident unity of heart and thought that existed between these two remarkable women.

" Why, Edna, I did not know you were listening."

" Yes, I was in the library, the door was open, and I could not avoid hearing, and I am so glad that I did," replied Edna, " but tell me, dear, how you conceived such a beautiful interpretation of the coming of Christ ? " she urged.

" I don't exactly know where I got the words to express the idea. I seemed to hear them within myself, perhaps my Higher Self spoke them for me. But the idea itself, I had one day in one of my visions, when I had been reading about the second coming of Jesus, and could not understand how He would come. Then I said aloud, ' O Spirit ! I do wish I might know all these things for certain—my own self ! ' Then, Edna, presently it seemed as if a mist in my brain, like a cloud, melted away and I was seeing it all, something like what I have tried to tell Mr. Clifford just now. But—but I do not think I should have said it had I known you were there, Edna," concluded Gracie, half-shyly.

" Why, my pet ? What difference would my hearing have made ? " questioned Edna in a tone of surprise.

" Oh ! well," Gracie answered, hesitatingly " you know, Edna, I am only a child compared to you, and I am learning from you of these wonderful truths ; and I would not like to teach my teacher." This with a wistful little smile as she caressingly stroked her sister's soft white hair with her long delicate fingers.

“ Gracie, dearest ! ” replied Edna, in expostulatory tones, “ you must not allow yourself to feel like that with regard to me. If you do, you would not be free to act and think for yourself : you ought to be absolutely untrammelled to listen to the voice of the Spirit within your own soul at all times. You know, dear, that the father has many varied expressions of Himself, and while He desires to express Himself in one particular way through you, He may do so in quite another way through me. We are all teachers of the Truth, Gracie, in our own particular way ; and it matters not so much *how* we do it, but it matters greatly *what we are*. That is what really counts full weight in God’s scales : what we are in our real selves, in our innermost being, independent of any forms, ceremonies, or traditions. The only true Life is the full natural life that wells up from the centre and **overflows** to the circumference of our being ; it is just letting the life, love and truth of the Infinite flow through us. That is the life that will always leave its mark upon the world : that is the life that the Master lived. No effort to do or to be anything in particular ; no desire to be branded as anything great or wonderful, but just a deep earnest yearning to express all that was pulsating through His great loving soul ; and by His perfection to manifest to the full the perfection of the All-Perfect—the Infinite—whom He knew and recognised as His Heavenly Father. No sermon counts, no teaching lives that does not do this : and the teachings of that wonderful Sermon on the Mount would have been as mere empty words, despite all their wondrous beauty of thought and diction, had Jesus not *Himself lived the Life* ! Yes, that is the only thing : just living the life ourselves, as perfectly as we know how, and all the rest will fall into line of itself. Every day will bring greater unfoldment : a new day, a fresh beginning, another step in the ladder of Truth that leads through darkness right back to the Great Heart of God ! ”

Just then Frank came up and claimed Cyril, who

had promised to drive with him to Wagga, and as the young clergyman was leaving the sisters he turned to Edna and said that he had spent a most instructive hour with Gracie ; and " I think," he added smiling, " I have received more real knowledge than I have ever gathered from all the lectures I ever attended ; at any rate I have got something to make me think."

" Then if that has been effected," returned Edna, " more than what you are now aware of has been achieved. Once we begin to think for ourselves we can never lose the habit : it grows on us. Just go on thinking independently and you'll reach your Promised Land, Mr. Clifford," and Edna smiled good-bye as he set off with Frank for their drive.

" You and Cyril have had quite a long chat, have you not, dear ? " she remarked, turning to Gracie.

" Yes, now I come to think of it, I believe we have," rejoined Gracie, smiling brightly. " But how funny it was ; only fancy, Edna, I have actually been preaching to a parson ! I never meant to, of course ; but he started it and would keep up the arguments, but though he seemed interested he naturally does not agree with our ideas."

" No, not yet, but I think that last speech of yours made an impression upon him, if I am to judge by the expression of his face while you were talking," said Edna quietly.

" I am glad if it did," Gracie exclaimed eagerly. " It would be splendid if he grasped these grand truths and would teach them, too. He has promised me that he will teach the people to whom he will preach how to live the lives that will hasten the Kingdom of Christ upon earth."

" As for Cyril himself, I do not doubt but that he would try, but he is bound to an institution and so must obey its laws. We can but hope and pray that the day will come, dear, when he shall have the courage to be an outcast, so to speak, for Christ's sake," answered Edna, as she wheeled Gracie's couch indoors.

But from that day there was a new life stirred

in the soul of Cyril Clifford ; only partially awakened, truly, yet called into being by the voice of this fair young girl whom he could not fail to admire and almost reverence for her gentle patience, forbearance and the cheerful spiritual strength which she showed under her great affliction. She was the sunbeam of the household, and all sought her couch in sunshine or storm. Never a word of repining ; never a complaint at her hard lot ; for this fair child with her great blue eyes expressing the purity and peace of the great soul within that frail temple, dwelt among them as the very embodiment of Love.

Yes, the Rev. Cyril Clifford would be sorry to leave that home atmosphere where such peace, love and harmony reigned ; where there was no sordid worldly position and social advancement, with the stress of having to keep up appearances, such as he had been used to in his own home life ; nothing of this marred the true meaning of the word Home in the squatter's household. But now above all this there was a consciousness of a new light that had dawned upon his soul, though it had not yet taken a very strong hold upon his mind. He found though that he had not solved *all* the problems of religious experience when he passed his examinations and took his degrees : that there were meanings to the Book of Books that he had never suspected, and, above all, that these new meanings, this higher rendering of its teachings (if he might dare use the term) gave a deeper satisfaction to the souls of those who grasped them, than what was evidently experienced by even church communicants. There was such a virility in this New Religion ; and he had to admit that he was never so deeply stirred throughout the whole course of his religious training (not even when he was confirmed, or admitted to the fold of the Church) as he was while he had listened to what he should have treated as the most heretical doctrines extant.

But why was it he felt powerless to treat them as such and dismiss them from his mind once and for all ?

Why, if they were what he had termed them, "blasphemous," did they keep recurring to him with such persistency, demanding an answer from him, requiring him to deal with them individually, not through another's decision? They would not be answered by rule and dogma, doctrines or traditions; they demanded that *he* himself should solve them. Why, too, did he wander to Gracie's couch and, sitting by her side, woo her to talk on these forbidden subjects? He could not yet give the questions an answer himself, but was like a moth attracted to the star, even though its very altitude makes its attainment impossible, still it will soar at the cost of its fragile life. And so did the Rev. Cyril Clifford leave the supposed safe ground of orthodoxy in his endeavors to reach and explore the unknown region of heterodoxy, known as New Thought, where he saw that Edna and Gracie Esbourne found so much real happiness and soul satisfaction; but which was to him as yet "a strange country." He had tasted a little of the milk and honey that came from this New Land, and once having imbibed it, his soul longed for more and he could not still its cravings.

But at this period of his development Cyril Clifford only lived on the physical and mental planes of his complex nature. His heart and soul life had not yet awakened thoroughly: they were only stirred: he was in a process of becoming. Therefore till the day when "he shall be born again" he will follow the path he had chosen and take up the work to which he had been appointed; filling in his years in trying to feed hungry souls on the dry husks of creeds and dogmas; while there is plenty of the Bread of Life and the Wine of the Spirit waiting to be showered upon the soul-starving masses of humanity. Spiritual food that will nourish both body and soul, cleansing them from sin and healing all their diseases. Yet such food is withheld from them because it has been considered contraband by those in authority; and is branded "heresy."

Yes, and for several years yet will this young and promising worker in the Lord's Vineyard withhold the

best which he has already had a glimpse of, even though but dimly, and for the sake of his position in the Church of the world, will continue to remain a stranger in the church of the Living God : that Church which is the Church of the First-Born, the Church Universal, into which it needs no high dignitaries to admit or receive him ; no ceremonial but that of a pure heart and contrite spirit ; that Church which is in the centre of Man's own soul, where God Himself is the light thereof and waits in the Holy of Holies to minister the sacrament unto those who will there seek Him in the Silence.

But Cyril Clifford will, as many others are doing to-day, still attempt to fill the office of a Cure of Souls while he is still a stranger to the Living Church and as yet incapable of curing the needs of his own soul. "Physician, heal thyself!" is a Bible statement, and yet, alas! how many of our Spiritual Physicians can truthfully and honestly say from their own inward conviction that their souls or bodies are saved and healed, let alone *satisfied* "with the good things of the Kingdom"?

CHAPTER XX.

A SOUL'S SOLILOQUY

"Only eyes that have wept, see clearly and far into the lives, the hopes and sufferings of their fellows; only eyes that have wept have their second sight."

—"MIND."

The visitors at "Cumbooqueepa" were all gone, with the exception of the Reverend Cyril Clifford, who was a stranger in Sydney, and had been persuaded to remain for the Christmas holidays. Ella had gone with the Godfreys to spend the holidays in town; and Leonard had also arranged to run down before Christmas week so as to be with Gwendoline. Everything was very quiet at the Homestead after the recent excitement of a full house; but the constant going to and from Honeysuckle Hut with necessities or with

the doctor, kept Mrs. Esbourne fully occupied all through the long hot days of that mid-December.

Roger Northbrook was progressing as favorably as could be expected, and they hoped to be able to remove him to the Homestead before Christmas Day ; but owing to the present condition of the tracks the doctor would not hear of it, and if things did not change there was every prospect of Roger having to spend his Christmas at the hut with Nurse Mysia.

Edna had called several times to enquire about Roger, but on no occasion was she permitted to converse with him ; so she merely left her basket of fruit or flowers with a message expressing hopes for a speedy recovery. There was a coolness in the young nurse's manner that chilled Edna, and she felt that her visits were not welcomed, therefore she went no oftener than courtesy demanded : whatever the misunderstanding might be, she was sure it would be all right when Roger recovered sufficiently to be brought back to the Homestead. In the meantime she had her sure remedy for all ills, and from the City of Refuge—her Place of Prayer—she sent him thoughts of health and strength daily.

Edna had learned to know the true meaning of the "Silence," and sought its holy precincts upon every occasion, when anxious or doubtful ; and more especially when her heart was full of a great thanksgiving, as it certainly was after the wonderful results of her experience with Roger on the night of his accident, when her demand had been so miraculously answered. She wanted to get away somewhere by herself and think out a new idea that filled her mind owing to that revelation, but it was not till after the visitors had left that Edna found herself free. Then one Sunday afternoon when everyone seemed to be occupied with their own matters of pleasure or leisure, Edna started off with her Bible under her arm to spend a couple of hours in silent meditation. She wanted to satisfy her mind upon some points about which she

was not clear ; and more than all to verify the meaning of Jesus' words regarding asking and receiving.

The spot towards which she bent her steps was the clump of forest trees which stood on the edge of the home field beyond the orchard. That spot where she had had her first memorable conversation with Roger Northbrook. That was the morning of a new and still deeper revelation to her soul ; and she had come now to seek at the one true Source for those jewels of Truth herself ; and in seeking she found the Light that lighteth every man. That Light which had revealed unto her wondering eyes the Secret of Jesus ; the hidden Mystery of the ages ; the open door by which He first entered and so became the Way to the Truth and the Life for every Soul. That door was the entrance to her Heavenly Father's presence and the golden gate of her own soul, through which gate she reached the holy of holies. She found the key in the Silence, and a voice on the threshold seemed to whisper :—

“ When the heart is still and listening,
When the lips are closed and dumb ;
When all nature is quiescent,
In the Silence *I will come.*

When the listening ears are straining,
For the Voice of Spirit near,
When the soundless sound is telling,
In the Silence *you shall hear.*

When the wondering eyes are opened
And you know the things that be,
That the ALL of Life is Spirit
In the Silence *you shall see.*

Ther with Soul alert, awakened !
In the Silence soft you go ;
With the Peace of Silence in you,
In the Silence *you shall know ! ”*

This Edna had, too, learned and realized more fully since that glorious spring morning when she passed beneath the trees in the orchard, filled with a

new life that brought a new and wonderful joy. To-day the boughs were heavily laden with their ripening fruits: some almost come to perfection; and as she looked at them the words recurred to her mind, "Old things are passed away, behold! I make all things new." Nature was, on that glorious morning, in the springtime of her year, and was making all things new in her kingdom; but they were the same things as she had made new last year—trees, plants, flowers—all were renewed from the same roots: it was only the new expression of themselves which she knew she then beheld. So, she thought, in like manner the soul can take on many garments of mentality; can clothe itself with numerous ideas; and perhaps numerous bodies in succession to express those evolving ideas; yet IT is the ONE Soul; the One Individuality, since the personality cannot be the individuality, though it may clothe or express it. So Jesus the Man, as our Exemplar, can show forth or manifest Christ—the GOD!"

Then, thought Edna, if the Soul is like unto the roots of the tree which is capable of clothing itself in various garments, through obedience to the immutable laws of Nature, from which it draws its life and sustenance, that soul can also adorn itself with new garments manufactured by the God-power—Thought—within its own being in the loom of life.

The body is but the soul's instrument, or the tool with which it performs its work in the world of shapes. When we as persons show forth sickness, disease, pain or death, we but reveal our lamentable ignorance of our craft, and proclaim ourselves not to be "cunning workmen." In fact, we do not know how to manipulate our tool, or we injure ourselves by our clumsy efforts through lack of training, which is essential to every expert workman. What then is the remedy for these mistakes? What remedy does the apprentice adopt to make himself a master builder? What but practice and experience!

"Yes, yes," exclaimed Edna aloud, as this thought came to her while she walked in deep meditation

towards her quiet retreat, "Now I understand what all sorrows, pains and troubles are intended to do for us! They are most certainly meant to teach us how to use our tools wisely and well; and what is the principal Tool in God's workshop if it be not the Body? That wonderful piece of mechanism is the glory of the Inventor, and should be a holy privilege to the skilled workman—MAN—to use! The lesser tools too are contained within the greater; like the machinery in a vessel or steam engine; and to know the correct use of every part of this, and the intricate working of each part, is as much an art and requires as much study as does any other trade or profession. Then a knowledge of every single part is essential to the complete working of the one great tool, and to the harmonious expression of the whole Body. "Then," she mused, "there are also the invisible tools, but yet very important ones also, and these are the manifold natures, impulses, desires, moods, tenses, promptings, longings, yearnings and ambitions—all of which go to make up the complex mechanism of that intricate and most wonderful Living Machine—MANKIND. Truly, it is indeed the most marvellous thing on earth to know *myself*! What a vastness there is in the stupendous problem which is named Life."

Yes, Edna now knew what it was that lent the newness and beauty to everything she looked upon: why and how her eyes saw more than they had ever seen before. It was because her point of view was changed, the focus altered, and instead of looking at herself as a suffering being apart: a unit in that Universal Life: she now beheld herself as a part of a stupendous Whole, and so seeing she saw God with the eyes of God!

She remembered her delight as she examined the tiny peaches and plums as they nestled close in the heart of the withered blossoms whose life and beauty had nourished and then given them birth; and she saw in that simple process of Nature another proof of the Oneness of all Life. Now as she paused this

summer afternoon, beneath the same fruit trees, she beheld those identical baby fruits nearing perfection, and, like the advancing year, nearly ripe. They were approaching their fullest development, and yet it seemed so short a time since they were, like the season and herself—in spiritual consciousness—new-born. As they had appropriated the moisture, the sunshine and the rain to aid their growth in that period, had she done likewise on the spiritual plane, and so ensured her soul's true growth? Had her Spring and Summer been correspondingly fruitful? she wondered.

She had been walking rather fast when this self-questioning began, but she slackened her pace and went forward more slowly with head bent in thought and self-communing over the answer to that query: reviewing in her mind the various degrees of soul growth which had been passed during that season; so that when she reached the nook by the pool amidst the forest trees and stood gazing down into the clear depths at her feet and saw her own reflection therein (just as Roger Northbrook had seen his and remarked on the trinity there revealed) she was able truthfully to answer the question she had put to herself in the affirmative. "Yes, she had developed very much during those last months, for her Teacher had been the Spirit of Truth in her own Soul."

Seating herself beneath a large tree, whose boughs sheltered her from the heat of the sun's rays, she opened her Bible, turned to the Gospels, and began to read carefully the accounts of the principal miracles performed by Jesus, especially those relating to His healing the sick and raising the dead. For some time she bent closely over the pages, and at length concluded her search by raising her head and repeating the words several times to herself which the Master spoke to His disciples: "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father."

"If ye believe in my name" also meant being his disciples, too, as were the men of old.

Then Edna laid the open book upon her knees and began to ponder aloud upon what she had been reading. "What," she questioned, "did Jesus mean by those words if it were not what they so plainly stated? The Master never told a lie, and He distinctly said 'Greater things—or works—should be done than He had even done.' Yet how was it that so many who had believed on His name, and called themselves His disciples, had never done anything which even approached the *great* things which the Teacher of Nazareth had done while in the physical body? Was there any reason for this failure in the past, on the part of those earnest souls who had certainly thought they believed *on His name*? Or was there a mystic meaning to His words?" Edna questioned with herself earnestly and with a heart longing to know the truth.

Yes, of course there was. It was the very spirit and life of the whole statement and it surely lay in the latter part of the sentence: "If ye believe on my name" (or if ye be my disciples), and "Because I go unto the Father."

The letter or generally accepted meaning of those first words had been taken to convey that this promise referred only to the little company of men who followed Jesus about the cities of Judea, and were known as "His disciples." But that statement would be useless for the salvation of the world and the generations to follow (and Jesus said He was the Light of the World, not only of Galilee and the centres over which He traversed during His life on this planet); so that if it only applied to the band of followers He had with Him then, what benefit or virtue could it bestow upon us in ages after those who had heard it with their mortal ears had passed out of the flesh?

"What was the mystic meaning that would help her to apply the great Teacher's promise to herself, now and for all future time?" Edna asked herself, and then sat in the silence and waited till the Spirit of all Truth and Wisdom should reveal the answer to her Soul.

Yes, surely, it came clearly and convincingly; most assuredly the meaning was that if we can only believe—realize our Oneness with the Infinite Life, love and wisdom of the Universe, Our Heavenly Father—as Jesus Christ had done, then by believing in that name, or following by the same way as He had done into the very presence of God, “ALL things should be possible to the one that so believeth himself to be a child of that Father, and so a brother of that same Jesus Christ. Did she believe and realize that Oneness? she questioned. Yes, she did, with all her heart and mind and spirit. Then in that case she could recognise the Divine Man—Christ—within herself; and inasmuch as such alone is God’s Son (for only the best, or highest, can belong to God), all less is but a stage or degree of progress thereto. She believed in that name and was in very truth a disciple or follower of the Master who had also recognised and manifested that belief in His daily life and teachings, and revealed it by His mighty works; then, by that appropriation of His inherent God-power which he had found hidden in His own pure and perfect essence, He showed Himself in His real being to the world as the highest form of perfection in the human which is named *Jesus*, which alone can reveal the next stage of spiritual unfoldment—the Divine, which is called “*The Christ*.” Therefore this perfected Man (Son of Man) called “Jesus Christ,” *must* be the Son of God, for He uncovers the Divine Likeness of the Father, or Lord God, which was from the beginning hidden in the Image, and named *Adam*, or, the Son of Man—and which is known as Mankind—a kind after Man’s idea as Christ is the Son of God—a kind after God’s idea.

As the Spirit of all Truth revealed these hidden mysteries to Edna Esbourne while she sat alone in the Silence she was conscious only of being filled with a holy awe, an overwhelming sensation of greatness and grandeur inconceivable to the mind that has never experienced anything but the delights of the senses on the physical plane of being. There was reverence of

her divine Self and her own wondrous complexity of being ; her hidden possibilities ; her divine attributes derived from the Father whose child she was. She saw dimly, yet gladly, that this revelation was for her own appropriation, for her own enlightenment just in the degree that her understanding had grasped its secret and sublime meaning. She knew now what it meant to appropriate or eat and drink of the body and blood of Jesus Christ—the Divine Lord of her Soul—and that meant she could live the life of the Son of God if she would ; for blood stood for Life, and living the life meant believing in the Father's Power within : and recognizing that Father's Life within her own soul, as he had done, would be eating of the body, or Substance which is the Spirit ; and thus literally she would be " putting on the Lord Jesus Christ," or have come to that stage of spiritual consciousness and unfoldment that enables us to realize and positively know that we are in very truth " gods "—sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father, heirs to the Kingdom of the One Absolute God.

Then, of course, all things are possible to us if we will but believe it. We shall have dominion and power over all things ; indeed, the power is now latent within us, just as the full-grown man is lying hidden within the babe, only waiting to be developed and hence revealed. When we come to this stage of consciousness we naturally are able to do the works of a Son of God, just as His first-begotten, or eldest son, Jesus, did. He said we were His brethren, and that His Father was our Father, and that Truth is for all eternity and for *all* Humanity : not only for one people or one age ; for God is no respecter of generations or nations any more than He is of persons, He is God of *all* the earth. This was so (and Edna was convinced in her own soul that it was), for it came from the Source of all truth, the Spirit within every man that giveth understanding. So she now saw that the great healing power of Jesus was for her to use as freely as He did. But how ? she asked.

Why! had not the Spirit already shown her how? by its wondrous operation through her as an instrument in Its hands only the other night by Roger Northbrook's bedside? She had knocked, believing; she had sought, finding; and in simple childlike faith in a Father's love, she had surely been answered and her joy was full—full to overflowing. Her bounteous Father had poured out His great gift of Life and Consciousness upon that dear one without delay or stint and she was at first as one overcome by such a bountiful shower of blessings. Her heart was overflowing with gratitude and she longed ever since for this hour, when in silence and solitude she could pour out her thanksgiving to the Source of All-Good for that miraculous supply. Prayer had become a necessity to Edna Esbourne: as essential to her soul as was the daily bread that nourished her body; for was it not the food of the Spirit, the Substance on which her soul grew? She quite understood now the joy Jesus must always have experienced when He could separate Himself from the others and get away alone with His Divine Self—the Father; how it was He could gladly rise before the day and go into a mountain apart to *pray*. Truly prayer is a great and wonderful strengthener, but it must be the deep desire of the soul, not the words of the lips, for "Prayer is the heart's sincere desire, uttered or *unexpressed*." Silent prayer is true prayer.

So Edna prayed with all her soul in her prayer as she lifted her clasped hands to her breast and bent her chin upon them and softly, reverently, whispered:

"Beloved Father of the Lord Jesus Christ and my Father, to whom I can now speak as a child would to an earthly parent, not only as a mortal to his God; as our Elder Brother taught us to pray, Our Father, my Father which art in the heaven of my own soul, Thy name is indeed hallowed—or all—to me now; I praise and give thanks unto thee, the All-Good, for this wondrous gift that has been revealed unto me. I thank Thee that, though such a babe in Thy Kingdom,

I have been found worthy of this at Thy hands : I who have just fully realized that I am Thy very child, I thank and bless Thee for the revealed gift of this great healing power. Now would I dedicate it to thee, to use to Thy honor and glory ; only teach me, guide me and direct me daily and sanctify me to this great work that I may yet use it for the good of all humanity ; for the healing of my many brethren and sisters in Thy great family on earth ; as Jesus our elder Brother taught us to do. Holy Father, let me so consecrate myself to this work that I may be enabled to heal not only the body, but the hearts, minds and bruised spirits of the weary children of earth. Teach me to unfold this wonder of my own being just opened up to me that I may be an instrument in Thy hands to restore to health and strength again that one whom my heart cherishes with a strong human love, and who is very dear to me—my well-beloved and afflicted sister Grace. Grant unto me the power to so manifest Thee that I shall be the instrument in Thy hands to relieve her of her physical disabilities, that she may be restored to the perfection of body as of mind and spirit in which Thou didst create her. Increase my faith, O my Father ! both for her and that other sufferer, and restore him also for thy honor and glory. I claim these rich and holy gifts of Life and Health in the name of the perfect Man, Jesus Christ. Amen."

When Edna ceased speaking, her voice was tremulous and her eyes were filled with tears : so intense had been her soul's desire ; so sincere her earnestness to win the boon she craved. Since that miraculous experience with Roger, Edna had cherished the thought of a more ambitious achievement ; one that almost took away her breath by its daringness and apparent impossibility. Yet she had now come to that stage when she believed that all things were possible to the one who *thought* them possible ; to the one who gave no place to doubt or fear, but with a brave strong heart and a dauntless courage, pressed forward in face of all obstacles, even overstepping the popular prejudices

created by the race-thought of centuries—yes, to that undaunted soul, the very gates of the Unknown would fly open and reveal the mysteries of the ages—the secrets of the Universe. To the one that seeks the vision of its God—his own soul's purity—and who gazes thereon till he is transformed into a paragon of Righteousness ; that one shall indeed become Master of himself, and Ruler of the Spheres.

To this strong point had the soul of Edna Esbourne come ; she was conscious of a feeling of determination to press forward into the mysteries of the Unknown ; and that was a source of strength in itself to this woman, for hers was an unconquerable soul. She had seen some light, but that only made her long for more and still more. An intense yearning, a great pulsating hunger for knowledge and greater understanding possessed her ; and she was never wholly satisfied even when she had reached the point she set out to gain. Like a mountain climber who aspires to reach a particular elevation and there behold the famous view reported to be visible from that point ; the moment he has attained his desired goal and drunk in the beauties that there meet his eye, he descries some more lofty peak which will doubtless reveal a more comprehensive view ; and so with all the fire of the explorer in his veins he plunges into the unknown path, leaving the beaten tracks far behind him, to explore this unknown country, willingly forsaking the lesser and familiar for the sake of the greater and unknown beyond.

It was so with Edna in her search for Truth ; she must go ever onward and upward, since these first early glimpses had done such great things for her. What might it not open up to her wondering gaze ? Glory upon glory, such as the heart and mind of mortal can scarce conceive of, is certainly hidden in the vast womb of Truth. Understanding is the rock on which she stands immovable ; Faith in *thyself*, thy Divine Self, is the Key which unlocks the Gates of the Citadel ; and Wisdom won by Experience is alone the Way to

that Kingdom of Power ; while all who enter into that City of God have indeed won Life—Eternal Life !

Therefore Edna yearned with her whole soul for wisdom, greater wisdom, so that she might walk direct to this Kingdom of Power, and rightly apply the gifts which she now knew she possessed in common with all the children of the Family of the Great All-Father. Then she would be anointed by the Spirit of the Lord, to begin her work for humanity. She had been purified by suffering in the past so that she might be able to heal the broken-hearted ; and had been prepared by passing through the furnace of affliction that she should also know how to set at liberty them that are bound, and so proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.

Was not her beloved little sister bound : a captive in a bruised and helpless body ? A beautiful soul in physical bondage ? Surely, argued Edna, if we are to have dominion, it must necessarily be over *everything*, even to making anew our bodies : building by our thoughts new and perfect fleshly temples for the soul, fitting abodes for the Divine Lord of our beings ; and this she knew could only be done by strong, pure, earnest thoughts—thought, concentrated upon the parts needing healing or strengthening till the body showed forth the care of the mental builder within, and expressed his artistic skill as plainly as does the home or place of abode reveal the tastes and habits of the dwellers in material houses. Then, she mused, that recent manifestation of power which was given her was only as a test of her faith, and was not vouchsafed for Roger's benefit alone : it was revealed for a much greater and grander purpose. It was as the angel who came down to trouble the waters of her soul that she might be the one to lead her little suffering sister into their healing depths ; for it was there in the souls of them both that the Great Physician, who should yet restore Gracie to health and strength, waited to minister the healing balm unto them. Then, when medical skill and modern science had signally failed and consigned her dear one to a life-long bondage, that

One who could heal all diseases (not only some, but *all*; none to Him were incurable) would operate in Gracie's body and give her life, as He had done through the medium of Jesus to Jarius' daughter and the widow's son; or to the multitudes, by healing their diseases in the cities of Judea. As He had operated through her in restoring Roger Northbrook to consciousness so also would He heal Gracie *according to her faith*. This "He or It" was the Divine Man in every human Soul, who was and is there from the beginning, and is only brought forth by the power of the Word—the spoken word of Truth—for "without the Word was nothing made that was made": "Speak the Word only and Thy servant shall be healed." That is, speak through the power of the Divine Self, only words of Health, Strength, Purity, Love and Life: anything less than these *true words* as applied to mankind is not of God.

Yes, Edna resolved she would try, she would at once seek Gracie and have a talk with her and get her co-operation and the Lord would be faithful to His promise as He was to the patriarch Abraham; He would certainly heal her beloved sister Grace.

Then what a triumph for this glorious New Science; what a Higher View of the Truth this would be; what a victory of the new over the old; of the substance over the shadow which mankind had been following so long like a "Will-o'-the Wisp"! While the world had been lost in contemplation of the majesty of Jesus, admiring His words and works and calling them miracles, the few—the very few—had wisely appropriated, or eaten them, and proved that those words of the Great Master were indeed what He proclaimed them to be: Spirit, Life and Substance; for by *appropriation* individually they feed Man on every plane of his being. It was for this reason He had said, "Greater works shall ye do, because I go unto (or into) the Father." He meant by this that if He remained a personality they would look only to Himself for life and

healing, and would never realize their own power as children of that same Father and that they possessed the same divine attributes as Himself. So He, the personal Jesus, went away that the Comforter might come to them as the Universal Christ of all souls, in the form of the Spirit of Truth, which is found in the secret chamber of every soul, and will lead us into *all Truth*.

"How wise He was," cried Edna, as she closed her Bible and prepared to return to the house. "Why, it is only now that I am beginning to understand what He meant by those words, because I know I am beginning to experience those very same truths He taught, and to feel them in the depths of my own being. There have been times when in deep sorrow and sore distress I have read those words and felt that the Comforter He promised had never appeared to me, though I greatly needed the comfort He said it would bring. But that was in the days of doubt and ignorance when I was learning my lesson in the school of experience, and groping in the dark for the light—this very light that has now burst upon my mortal vision with a brilliancy and glory that is beyond description: a light that reveals unto me the grandeur of the character and the sublime unselfishness of that great Elder Brother, Jesus, as I never could have seen or understood it before. We have to taste and prove that the Lord is good, before we can really know it is so; or even assure others of the fact. It is possession that brings life, not profession; for to-day our God is a living God, and His tabernacle is with men: yes, in the very centre of our souls is His Mercy Seat—the holy of holies.

"What a long time ago it seems since I was in 'The Valley of Shadows,'" she mused. "Yes, strangely enough, it is nine years ago to-day since I started to learn my life's lesson in the school of sorrow and suffering; and truly I have been wonderfully led by an unseen hand since that hour. I have gone through all the pangs that a human heart can endure; all the humiliations and disappointments that can fall

to the lot of one woman in such a brief period : all the bitterness and shame that a husband can heap upon the head of the woman he calls by the sacred name of wife. I have tasted the privileges of motherhood without its joys ; I know the hungry aching void that dwells in the heart of a bereaved mother, ' that want that hollows all the heart ' ; the yearning that no other joy can satisfy ; the longing of a mother for her child, for that which is the flesh of her flesh, life of her life, and the breath of her very soul ! To hold in the arms the little being which should have been the pledge of a sacred love between two hearts : the link that should have bound them closer as with a golden chain, snatched from my grasp before I had tasted its delights ! Yes, all this was mine and should still have been mine. But, oh ! what Dead Sea fruit it all was, through the wrong done to the mother and visited upon the little one by him who should have loved and protected both !

" Oh ! God, my God, what a travesty upon the holy name of love was that which was given to me in Love's name ; what a defilement of all that was pure and holy ; what a desecration of all that was honorable, loyal and true ; what a crime against maidenhood and virtue ; what a violation of all that is or should be understood to exist in that bond of spiritual and physical union between two beings, and called '*marriage*' ! Jesus said, ' Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures and the power of God ; for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven.'

" In the Resurrection," repeated Edna contemplatively. " When could that be, if it is not *now* ? Am I not resurrected from the dead, or carnal self ; dead to my past ignorance and error, and awakened, or alive, to my Higher or Divine Selfhood ? This state of spiritual consciousness is surely the resurrection which Jesus referred to, and in this condition the ' Children of the Resurrection ' neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels in heaven.

Then in the true spiritual sense, as well as in the literal meaning of these words, that which the world knows as marriage is not such in the sight of God ; it cannot be unless it is a union of souls, not a union of bodies only. ' God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity and it is stated that ' every child of Adam (the fleshly or natural man) is born of sin ' ; therefore the wrong that was done to me under the contract known in the world as marriage was not a violation of God's holy ordinance, but only of man's self-constituted social laws ! That condition was of the flesh, not of the Spirit, and the soul had no part in it, so there could be no true spiritual union which alone is ' as the angels ' (for male and female created He *him*—Generic MAN) . such union no divorce can sever and no man put asunder, for God hath joined them together from the beginning.

" Yet that which I once understood as ' marriage ' was in my case put asunder by man ; then am not I justified in concluding that it was not a true marriage in the sight of God ? There was no wrench to my soul ; there have been no regrets, only a great gladness because of my moral and spiritual freedom. Why, if this wrench was a disobedience to God's Laws, has it not left a life-long regret, a remorse and deep sorrow in my heart ? Why has my whole life not been wrecked and my spiritual growth and mental development stunted under the blight that fell upon my life seven years ago ? Rather, have I not felt purer, holier, stronger, more self-respecting and reliant on the power within myself than ever in my life before ; have I not also learned to know the true God and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent ? This great reward would not have been bestowed upon me if my divorce from Eugene Vernon had been a violation of God's holy laws. If my Father in Heaven, whom I know now, had really made that marriage between us and we had really been true husband and wife, then no one on earth or in heaven would have been able to sunder us. If the world really believes that God makes every marriage

that is contracted, then surely no law made by man is justified in sundering them !

“ What were my feelings,” she questioned herself, “ when I married Eugene Vernon ? Why did I become his wife ? Because I then believed I loved him with my whole heart ; with all the power my being was then capable of feeling for a man ; but I did not love him with my soul, because my soul had not awakened from its sleep of sense consciousness : Then, my feelings only emanated from the heart, not from the soul, else why did they die ? How could any action on his part kill it, were it soul love ? Why did I cease to love and respect him had he really been the other part of myself, since everyone must love himself. On the contrary, I began to experience only a deep repugnance towards his cruel selfish nature which expressed itself in every vile action and impure word ; till at last my whole being revolted at the contact with him which compulsory union then entailed ! Later even that feeling died away and in its place came a supreme indifference which grew in the place where only the beautiful flower of love once bloomed in my heart ; then only a shadowy memory of what *might* have been under other conditions was left with me. This even now haunts my mind like the pale ghost of a dead past, recalling to my empty heart how great was the power of human love that once ruled it ; how intensely did I love him in the days that are gone, till I found my idol had feet of clay ! What irony of fate surely that I, who have such a wealth of love to bestow, find its channels closed. I—I, ‘ who pour forth Love like drenching tidal waves ’—am left alone to-day in a world of Love bereft of a dear object on which to lavish that love ‘ with deep and daring giving.’ Now, now, the inner courts of my heart are in ruins, its altars are broken down and the fires have gone out, and I—‘ I sit among the ashes of my life, with nought but the dream of my lost youth ! ’ It seems as though I have lived my whole life’s span in one brief season and now only the loneliness of the

wilderness stretches before me that I must travel unloved and alone!

"But no! What am I saying? I who have had such wondrous joy given me instead! Such deep and full compensation from a loving Father's hand for all the ills I have endured; for all the loss of earthly good? Has not my sorrow been for some good purpose that as yet I cannot see? May it not be that I am reserved for some great destiny? Yes, it must be so, or surely I should not have had the courage to bear: the power to endure! I would have felt that I was the plaything of a cruel Fate and have ended it all long ago, as I was tempted to do that day in the churchyard!

"No, no, no!" she cried aloud, clenching her hands firmly, while her features expressed the force of her feelings. "No! I am Master of my Fate! I am Ruler of my own life! Maker of my Destiny, Captain of my Soul! I will be all that I desire to be, despite the many stumbling blocks that beset my path to that desired goal! I am free, for ever free! Nor shall I ever be in bondage again. The cords that bound me to earth are severed for ever and I now soar into empyrean heights, unknown to those who are chained to ties of earth, or whose hearts are bound to other hearts by such close ties that they cannot be severed without a sore wrench, for they are held by the passion the world calls *Love*!

"But what is this Love that is left to me? Why, it is a greater, grander love! An impersonal love! The Love of the Universal! Love for all Beings! Love for the Absolute! Love that is truly and wholly the life of the soul!"

As these last words passed her lips, and her ears grasped their meaning, Edna drew in her breath with a deep gasp, for she had touched a secret spring in her being, and the conviction quickly flashed upon her that she was privileged to know that Love which was "the life of the soul"! She knew and had experienced what love between soul and soul alone meant. Knew

what constituted the true marriage as Jesus referred to it, the state which was "as the angels in heaven." It was the God-Marriage and the love that presided at that altar was holy love pure and undefiled—vestal love! The love that knew nought of pleasure as an end; but of reverence and duty; and pleasure only in fulfilling such! Love which seeks not to be ministered unto, but to minister! Love that rejoices in the opportunity of service, in the laws of right and truth for their own sakes, not as compulsory. The law of the spiritual nature, which law is chastity and temperance in all things and the self-sacrificing spirit for the good of the beloved; the law of love that keepeth its temple holy and honorable unto the Lord! This is the law of true *soul marriage*!

And it was such soul-love that had been vouchsafed to her: the lonely, forsaken, and disappointed one. This was love eternal, she knew well, for it could never die, even though the body that held the soul (and which her soul loved) were to pass off the physical plane—were to be lost to her sight, she would still love her soul's immortal partner. The universe itself could not hide him from her, and even though circles of spiritual growth should separate them for a cycle of time; yet she would meet him again and claim him for her own; he could never be utterly lost to her. They had already recognised each other—he but dimly, 'tis true—yet his soul had touched the outer rim of the atmosphere in which hers now moved, and knew its native air. Therefore even unknown to himself his soul would love hers and hers only for ever and ever life without end; it would never again be fully satisfied until it awoke and beheld in her its likeness: its very divine self revealed.

The man himself might not yet be consciously awake to his divinity so as to fully recognise in her his true wife, his only help-meet; still none the less she was consciously awake, and knew who she was and what he was to her and she to him—his *alter ego*. He might even, while in his present physical body, love

another woman while he still slept the sleep of sense-consciousness and *dreamed* only of his soul's wife. He might marry another as she also had done while she slept, and think that that other could fill all the demands of his being, satisfy his heart and fleshly desires. Yes, all this might be, even for years, or perhaps during many earth lives might he continue in this dream, and so hush his soul's longings. But the hour would come when he would awaken from this sense-sleep and know her as she knew him, and forthwith he would not rest till he had sought for and found his soul's mate and true spiritual half.

The road he would travel till that hour dawned would perhaps be a long and dreary one, for once having had a glimpse of his divine partner and turned his face away deliberately and chose the other path (the path of the senses) he would have to retrace all those steps. His teacher too would be experience and might prove a more severe task-master to him than before, because he was no longer an ignorant child, but a soul that *knew*. Edna now knew that nothing could keep from her her soul's husband who dwelt at present in the form or shape known to the world as Roger Joshua Northbrook; and she could wait for him till the hour when he should fully awaken and know her. In the meantime she would not begrudge him one hour of his experience, since it was all so necessary to unfold his soul from the wrappings and reveal its divinity to itself. Like the woman of Samaria at the well to whom Jesus spoke, telling her "she had had many husbands and he whom she then dwelt with was not her husband," so Edna knew that she also had had many husbands until now that her Soul (awakened from the sleep of ages) knew itself what it really was—a conscious being centred in God, and companioned by Divinity—but that this awakened soul can only have *one* husband and that is its other half; its completer self to whom it is eternally wedded from the beginning.

This was the knowledge that kept her strong and

calm, for her trust was stayed in that one Divine Lord whom she also knew was the ruler in Roger Northbrook's soul; and that He would do all things well. Had He not already led her through many deep waters of affliction; through the miry clay of ignominy and bitterness of heart; along the rough and thorny paths of doubt, fear and even despair; yet had never really forsaken her? Then surely He for His Own Name's sake would be faithful to His promise given her in her early vision, and "be with her always even unto the end of the world"? Yes, till she had overcome every obstacle, every mortal hindrance, every temptation, and had done as Jesus also had done, "overcome the world" (or those impediments in the soul's progress back to its Father's House) and so won dominion and power as became a true child of the Most High, and thus be entitled to take her place as a perfected soul among the sons and daughters of Heaven.

How then must she stand before the Absolute? Why, perfect, as she came forth in the beginning! A complete and harmonious Soul! Was she that now, even with the new light of Truth illuminating her mind? No, she was only half a soul—the female half as the expression of the Almighty, the Motherhood of God. Then she having arisen from the dead—or Adam sleep of sense—must now seek her other half, the masculine expression of Jehovah—or the Fatherhood of God—of whom she was part, or within, from the beginning; and having once found and recognised that other self (never mind in what form it was hidden) she must, for her own soul's ultimate salvation, use her conscious God-power and redeeming love upon that son of man. Then must she as a spiritual part of himself draw him unto her, back to the lost Eden of rest, peace and love from which she had allowed him to stray; for he would never reach it without her; she was his complement and he was hers; as two in One they came forth and as One in two they must return unto the Father!

For this reason, if for no other, should every

creature on earth love one another, because they know not who, in the Father's great human family, may be their other half soul ; and while that poor outcast and rejected one is wandering far from the fold, a prodigal from the Father's house, there can be no entrance for that one whose completeness awaits the coming of its other self. This is why Jesus said so often, " Love one another."

This great and wonderful revelation came to Edna Esbourne that Sunday afternoon as she sat in the forest nook. Then she realized that in very kindness to herself she must consider that soul, whom her soul loved, her own peculiar care. Yet it must all be done so silently, so unobtrusively and tenderly ; not interfering in the slightest degree with its natural development ; not daring to hasten its unfoldment or force its recognition even for its own sake or hers. All must be done by the silent power of the Spirit, the Spirit of Love and Truth working through her soul alone, and this should be the means of communing with his soul ; and thus by the mystic cords of pure immortal love would he be drawn from worldly pursuits ; weaned from all fleshly desires ; wooed to seek only the highest, and search out the deep things of God. And by so searching find his own divine self as she had done, and knowing and claiming her for his own these two severed parts of one perfect whole would rush together, " closing as an individual life " in an eternal embrace of transcendent love : to know themselves as they are known to the Infinite Father of all Souls and thus realize that this alone constitutes " Marriage " ! This alone is " as the angels in heaven," neither male nor female, but one body or person and so one spirit in one dual Soul ; Three in ONE and One in Three, the Holy Trinity !

" Oh ! Stupendous Mystery ! They are then a duality in unity over which broods the everlasting Third, which forms this mystic Trinity ! Such are ever God's angels, and are undoubtedly in His Heaven when they attain to those pure heights of spiritual

consciousness ; and experience that holy love through which they dwell together in unity, thus showing forth God's perfect marriage which none can put asunder ; for they are then become ' One as their Father, and perfect, as their Father in Heaven is perfect '—One in Christ ! ”

As the Spirit of all Truth revealed these hidden mysteries to Edna Esbourne while she sat alone in the Silence, she was conscious of being filled with a holy awe ; an overwhelming sensation of greatness and grandeur, inconceivable to the mind that has never experienced anything higher than the delights of the senses as known on the physical plane of being. There was a reverence for her divine self ; for her own wondrous complexity of being ; her hidden possibilities ; her divine attributes derived from the Father whose Child she was. She saw dimly, yet gladly, that this revelation was for her own appropriation ; for her own enlightenment just in the degree that her understanding had grasped its secret and sublime meaning, and she could say with Walt Whitman—

“ And whether I come to my own to-day or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness
I can wait.”

CHAPTER XXI.

A THING OF BEAUTY.

“ It is by believing in, loving, and following illimitable ideals that man grows great. Their very impossibility is their highest virtue. They live before us as the image of that into which we are to grow for ever.”

—STOPFORD BROOKE.

As Christmas approached the days were excessively hot. Indoors the atmosphere was stifling, for windows and doors had to be kept closed to exclude the terrible hot winds that were blowing furiously across the arid western plains, bringing on their blighting wings tokens of distress from the drought-stricken districts over

which they had passed in swift flight ; breathing into the nostrils of those who knew these dire signs but too well the odor of burnt grass and smouldering timber, which only too surely heralded the approach of that dreaded foe to progress and the onward march of civilization in the back-country districts of Australia—the relentless Fire Fiend !

During such days Gracie suffered intensely, and the Rev. Cyril Clifford even more so. On one of these “ scorchers ” (as they are usually termed) Gracie had been prostrated with the heat ; and as it grew a little cooler towards five o’clock, Cyril wheeled her couch out upon the lawn beside the summer house under the shelter of a rose arbor, where the beautiful white and crimson ramblers intermingled their wealth of blossoms in dense profusion. In spite of the dry weather, the turf here was soft, green and velvety, due to the gardener’s constant care ; for this was Gracie’s favorite bower. Over it the fallen petals of the lovely pink and white blooms were showered by the morning’s wind, giving the spot a charming effect, especially to the eye of artist or poet.

Here the air seemed cooler, and the perfume of roses and honeysuckle, which struggled to bloom, even under these trying conditions, was a welcome change to the oppressive atmosphere that prevailed inside. The odor of the flowers refreshed them after the hot breath of the westerlies and soothed the nerves that had been so sorely tried all day. The squatter informed the Rev. Cyril that these climatic conditions were usual at this particular season of the year in Australia ; although certainly rather severe on this occasion, owing to the protracted drought and the proximity of large bush fires in the district. The young Englishman on such days was unfitted for exertion of any kind, while outdoor exercise was out of the question for him. Consequently, he had to content himself during the day with indoor amusements, and what more natural, being so much in the house, than that he should gravitate to Grace’s invalid couch ? That he should

find there all the pleasure, occupation and amusement he desired: all the companionship he could wish for in the society of the fair delicate girl with her sweet spirituelle face and gnome-like eyes? She who had so much to talk about; so many quaint ideas; like beautiful pictures vitalized by the mind from which they sprang and painted by words and tones peculiarly her own.

Gracie Esbourne was a born poetess, a muse imprisoned in a frail and delicate form, compelled to remain bound to a helpless body when the spirit within desired to soar to heights unknown. Cyril Clifford was a clever artist and landscape painter spoiled by conventionality and forced by the unwritten laws of society, status and expediency into a profession eminently respectable but entirely foreign to his tastes and inclinations. Not for him the stress and strain of daily toil; the continual devotion to duty for duty's sake; only dire necessity and a compliance with a will stronger than his own could have torn him away from the life that he would have chosen for himself had he been freely consulted. His one real delight as a youth—and even now as a young man entering into a new sphere of life altogether where such tastes were not compatible with ultimate success—his one chief delight was to lie full length on a grassy bank by a rippling brook under spreading trees, listening to the murmur of insects and songs of birds, inhaling the soft, seductive breath of springtide flowers whose odorous incense floated upon the light zephyrs at early morn or dewy eve. To revel in a glorious moonlight night among beauteous scenes that soothed the senses and charmed the eye; everything that spoke of light, shade, color, harmony, beauty, ease, elegance, peace, rest—all these were as much a part of Cyril Clifford's real self, and as necessary to his full enjoyment of life as were the use of his limbs for exercise. Had he been wealthy, his tastes would have caused him to develop into an indolent Sybarite; but as experience had taken him in hand to teach, and circumstances forced him into

an active channel, he at present but drifted on its bosom, borne on by the current to the Ocean of Enterprise. Ever and anon he kept his eyes fixed longingly upon the flower-strewn shores and shady banks through which his Life-stream wended its way, dreading, as he probably did in his heart—and which tended to make him loiter a little longer in this restful happy home at “Cumbooqueepa”—dreading the hour when he would have to buckle to and use his oars to keep his frail craft afloat by his own efforts, or to prevent it stranding on the beach of Failure, where so many have already perished. In the meantime, however, he was determined to pluck what delights came within his reach, and was consequently contented with the enjoyments of the moment. The young man only really lived in these sensations, anything else at present was mere existence, and the more strenuous the exertions the work demanded, the more objectionable was it to him.

He was like all such undeveloped characters, before the serious part of life presents itself to their view and forces them by hard knocks and severe bruises into the niche they were destined to fill. Such wander through the aisles of life's cathedral with listless loitering steps; admirers of the wonders they are but too ready to think have been displayed there solely for their pleasure, to gratify their love for the beautiful, and pander to their comfort and convenience; forgetful that every effort, every endeavor, every achievement, has been won only by self-sacrifice on the part of the workers who have gone before, and by untiring patience and calm deliberate application to the work in hand, or the thing to be done. Not by easy-going indifference and indolent enjoyment are the great things of the world produced: it requires great earnestness, endless perseverance and purposeful zeal to create anything worthy of immortality; and this is not done in the hey-day of youth by sentimental dreamers in the fields of life who chase Pleasure with as much ardour as one would expend in achieving some great purpose,

only to find that when much of their best energy has been wasted in the pursuit, it is but the shadow of Reality they have caught and so missed the substance. Were all content to follow the giddy footsteps of such life-wasters, there would soon be nothing left for the coming generations to view but scenes such as Macaulay describes in his famous passage, when "A traveller from New Zealand shall stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St. Paul's." As others have built, achieved and perfected for us, so it is now our duty to do the same, or even better, for those who shall follow on behind us in the great cycles of life; therefore let everyone of us see that as we traverse the broad pathway along which so many feet have yet to travel, and over which millions have already passed we are still but pioneers; and like all true pioneers it is our duty to "blaze the track."

Cyril Clifford's artistic tastes, however, did not end in sensations of pleasure only. He was an expert with brush and pencil and had he been permitted to follow the bent of his own inclinations, doubtlessly he would have cultivated this talent to the exclusion of all others; and probably produced something worthy of himself and fitted to take a place among works of art. As it was his path had turned off at the cross-roads between Art and Duty; and he chose the latter, so that he who should have wedded Art, now merely kept her secretly hidden away as a beautiful seductive mistress with whom he could at times indulge an hour's sweet dalliance.

During the close companionship into which he and Gracie had drifted, Cyril had confided to her his passion for the brush and pencil, and had also shown her his portfolio of drawings and sketches which he had executed. All his scenes were in miniature, all were reposeful, peaceful, still: symbolical of the man himself: gentle, placid and calm as the surface of some unruffled lake which reflects the blue sky by day, or the silent firmament of stars and silvery moon by night; into which it would seem sacrilege to throw even a pebble

or to disturb its mirror-like bosom by the obtrusive reflection of one's own shadow cast thereon. Cyril's sketches were outward visible expressions of his inward hidden self: correct in outline, perfect in detail, artistic in finish, and true to nature and life. Yet it was life as viewed through the eyes of youth in spring-time or summer glory. Nowhere was there a scene in that collection that depicted storm and tempest; winter's snow-clad landscape; the bleak desolation of wind-swept wastes; or even lofty mountains with their towering peaks enveloped in lowering clouds or misty vapors; no coastlines where the constant wash of many waters dashed against the frowning faces of impregnable rocks with a mighty force that only their rugged granite fronts could resist, emblems of the power of endurance—Fortitude. Nothing coarse, hard, unkind, cruel, rough or inharmonious; nothing that did not appeal to the beautiful; no picture of battle, pillage, carnage, fire, flood, wrecks or dangers of any kind would ever be depicted by the brush of Cyril Clifford. He shuddered at the very thought of such things; they were absolutely foreign to his nature as it had up till then developed, but the saving grace of the stronger portion of his face had yet to assert itself—and might save him yet. In the meantime while this character is being brought forth he has enlisted himself to fight under a banner unfurled to wage war against sin, vice and ignorance: a more deadly feud than ever engaged the soldiers of nations, and one that requires energy, endurance, determination, zeal and steadfast devotion on the part of each individual soldier, more than any other war that was ever waged in the battle-fields of the world. How he happened to enter those lists has already been explained. How he stands equipped for the fray, physically, mentally, morally, and spiritually, is partially revealed. But how he will acquit himself during the pending engagement remains to be seen.

In the course of the many hours which the Rev. Cyril Clifford spent by Gracie's side, he had indulged

to the top of his bent his passion for sketching ; and had taken pictures of her in all her favorite garden haunts ; while the one where she was ensconced to-day was the scene of several very excellent drawings both in water-colors and oils, which elicited the admiration of all in the household and Gracie's unfeigned praise. She insisted upon having a copy of all her favorite ones, and he of course desired to include one of them in his own collection, so that he was generally required to do two of each, which took a fair amount of his time and gave plenty of opportunity for long chats between them. On this particular occasion he was busy finishing his second sketch of Gracie in this pretty nook, reclining upon her couch among Oriental rugs, with a large Japanese umbrella shading her uncovered head and delicate rose-leaf face while her wealth of beautiful fair ringlets clustered over her shoulders and spread upon the gay-colored cushions in artistic disorder, but partially veiling the snowy throat and shell-like ears.

What a sweetly pretty picture she made, with the masses of crimson and white roses on their green background as a bas-relief to throw up her dainty white robed figure in its graceful, though forced, reclining pose. One white hand so small and shapely held the handle of the gorgeous parasol, and the raised attitude caused the lace to fall back from the wrist, revealing the snowy rounded arm with its skin like polished satin beneath which the tracery of blue veins could be seen resembling miniature streams meandering through fields of snow.

She had plucked a cluster of the crimson flowers and for a while toyed with them lovingly, laying them caressingly against her oval cheek or touching their delicate petals with her dainty white fingers, and when Cyril announced that he was ready she coquettishly stuck the brilliant spray of blossoms in her hair, making a beautiful sunset effect of crimson and gold. It instantly caught the young artist's eye and awakened his intense passion for the beautiful.

Yes, Grace Esbourne was very lovely, with a loveliness peculiarly her own, and the one thing above all others which enhanced her beauty was her perfect unconsciousness of the fact. While Cyril sat on the low chair before her, with one arm encircling his sketching board, and the other hand holding the pencil, which remained poised for some minutes between his fingers, he gazed upon the figure before him, breathing deeply, silently. He was in reality drinking in a full draught of what was, to a nature like his, intense pleasure, and unspeakable delight. The joy of looking his fill upon so much that charmed and gratified every demand was all he desired for the present moment; and he was content to sit and gaze, like one who beholds a rose with half-opened petals and sparkling with diamond drops of dew, nestling among its velvety green leaves. He means to have that lovely bud for himself—but not yet, not yet could he bear to wrench it from its stem. He is content to stand and gaze at it with its beautiful head drooping in maiden modesty, rejoicing only in its own wondrous inner life, and the joy of unfolding its heart to the revivifying rays of the morning sun; never dreaming of the intention in the admirer's mind; not even noticing the hand at length stretched forth to pluck it—even if ever so gently or tenderly—from its parent stem. Not till the wrench comes which scatters the drops of morning dew, does it feel the warm clasp of embracing fingers upon its slender stalk; and it is conscious of the hot breath pressed against its soft and delicate petals; and then placed over a strongly beating heart. There it is nestled and cherished with jealous loving care, or—perhaps, left to fade or wither. But, who can tell the fate of a rose, once plucked, or who can safely prophecy the destiny of a fair maiden?

“Go on, Cyril! What are you waiting for and why are you staring at me so long? I’m all right, am I not?” cried Gracie impatiently.

“Yes, oh yes! Certainly you are. I forgot,” he

answered, hastily recalled from his sense dream of beauty by her musical voice.

"Oh! did you indeed, sir? Well, I must say that was not very complimentary to me after all my trouble to try and please you. I'm not too certain whether I shall not also 'forget' to pose," she returned, in tones of mock displeasure.

"No, no, please Gracie don't do that!" he exclaimed hastily, as she attempted to scatter the rugs; "I will tell you the truth, Gracie: I was just drawing a mental picture of you and wondering if I could paint you as accurately from memory as with you by my side. Only ——"

"Oh! I see," she interrupted. "You have photographed me on the sensitive plate of your mind by a mental process and the aid of the optic nerve. Now don't you think, Cyril, that is a dangerous thing to do?" (They called each other by their Christian names, it came so natural to two such very *natural* beings).

"Why, Gracie? What could be dangerous about that?" he asked, smiling into her great eyes as they rested upon him.

"Well, because if you ever want to get rid of the mental picture you'll have to break the negative, and in this case it would be a rather difficult process, I should think." This last remark was uttered most innocently and with a mischievous glance at him from under her long lashes.

Cyril Clifford returned the look with a deeply earnest one, and said gravely, "Yes, you are right, Gracie, it *would* be a difficult process and therefore one I shall never—no, never—desire to attempt; I would prefer to keep this negative intact forever."

"Oh! but if you fill your mental camera with photos of everything and every person that please your eyes only, Cyril, you'll have no plates left for the more beautiful and enduring scenes of real life; the pictures that will never fade nor die nor the negatives of which can ever be broken, even if we so desired, for they are

printed indelibly upon the soul. You know the kind I mean, Cyril, don't you ? ”

“ Yes, perfectly, and fully appreciate the beautiful simile, too,” he responded. Then added meditatively, “ But there is a Bible text which says that ‘ Man shall not live by bread alone,’ and though it is a statement that applies to spiritual things it can also be made to read that man, being a creature with a mind and body as well as a soul, cannot live harmoniously if only one of these be fed. Would you advise that all the delights of the senses be suppressed and the whole physical self kept in the background ? Do your new theories teach this, Gracie ? ” he questioned with some show of rebellion.

“ Certainly,” asserted Gracie, “ because they belong to the lesser or lower self, and that self must be crucified or brought into subjection to the higher. The sense-life must die that the soul-life may live for ever.”

“ Well, I think, that to be quite harmonious on all planes (as you and Miss Esbourne express it) we are required to be temperate, that is to suppress all vices or evil desires ; but I don't see that we should starve any one of our natures for the sake of another,” he protested.

“ Nor should we,” she hastened to say, “ but we are not to feed one at the expense of others either, as we are apt to do, and then consider it a virtue.”

“ Well, I don't know whether you think an inordinate love for beauty is feeding or banqueting one sense at the cost of another,” he ventured. “ If so, I am not aware which one is being starved in consequence. I only know I revel in all things beautiful ; I adore beauty of form, sound, sense, smell and touch ; every sense is alive and each and all have been given us for enjoyment as well as use. I feel that we are praising God just as much when we admire His beautiful creations, whether in Nature or Art of any kind. It would take away the best part of my life to deny me the delights of beauty : everything that is lovely

appeals to me, and I am and will ever be a worshipper at the shrine of the Goddess." And as Cyril spoke his pale face flushed with the suppressed passion for beauty which lurked in look and tone as his eyes rested upon the fair young girl before him.

Gracie, however, was quite unconscious of the intense admiration in Cyril's look and voice, for her mind was occupied with an idea which something they had recently been reading together now recalled, and she said, smiling at him coyly:

"Then, Cyril, you would have done as Paris did, when he was asked to decide between the Graces? I suppose you would have unhesitatingly thrown the apple to Venus?"

"Most undoubtedly," he asserted, smiling. "What man is there could have done otherwise?"

"And risked all the consequences, too?" she queried.

"Well, that would depend upon circumstances. It would be hard to say for certain, for one never knows what he would do till he is tested. Still if a man has one master passion, he is the more to be commended if in spite of temptations he can overcome it," answered Cyril confidently.

"Have you a master passion, Cyril?" asked Gracie, lifting her eyebrows slightly.

"I am afraid I have, though it is an innocent one, I hope," he replied musingly, as he sat watching the varied expressions on her sweet face.

"You mean your great love for all beautiful things?" she suggested softly.

"Yes," he admitted, "to me Beauty is Divine. I adore beauty."

"And so we should when it is beauty of the soul as well as beauty of form. The 'without' should be as the 'within,'" she said.

"Then I am in the right of it," he cried triumphantly, "for I am worshipping them both now before me," with a meaning glance at Gracie.

"Go on with your sketch, Cyril, or you'll not get

it finished before the light fades," returned Gracie quickly, her eyes dropping in silent confusion before his ardent gaze.

In obedience to her command he took up his pencil and then rose to rearrange the rugs and parasol which had slipped from their position while they had been talking. While replacing the handle in her grasp his fingers came in contact with her warm slender ones and instantly a thrill passed through him that caused his heart to beat more rapidly and the hot blood to surge to his temples in a crimson tide that vied with the roses in her hair. Gracie's fair face went just a shade paler and her eyelids drooped shyly. Then in his hasty confusion Cyril caught his sleeve-link in one of her long curls and in his endeavors to loosen it without hurting her, the soft ring of golden hair twined itself around his finger and encircled it like the tendrils of a vine, clinging lovingly to the new support.

"Look! Gracie, see, it has given itself to me!" cried Cyril, eagerly. "It's mine. May I take it?"

A quick constrained little laugh was her only answer.

"Say 'yes,' Gracie!" he urged, in a nervous whisper.

"Yes," softly murmured the sweet red lips.

He heard, and quickly lifting his knife, which lay among his drawing materials, severed the golden lock from among its companions. The next moment it was lying in his palm, where he had gently slipped it off his finger so as not to disarrange the interwoven threads of gold. Then he bent his head reverently and pressed his lips upon the golden circlet, murmuring gently:

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever!"

The action and words aroused Gracie and, finding her voice, she exclaimed with a nervous little laugh:

"Oh! Cyril, what are you doing? That's not like you. What do you want it for?"

"To add to my mental picture gallery," he answered. "This shall be my golden mascotte, Gracie!"

"Do please put it away quickly, Cyril, here comes Edna!" she cried in dismay. "What shall I tell her when she misses that curl, as I know she will to-night?"

"Tell her ——" he paused and looked at her very earnestly and speaking slowly and deliberately, said. "Tell her, Gracie, that I took it as a token of the angel it represents and my worshipful reverence for *Beauty that is Divine*."

He had spoken in suppressed tones while he was busy folding the curl in a piece of soft paper; and, placing it between the leaves of his pocket Testament, he closed it carefully and placed it back in his inside coat pocket. He was seated with his head bent over the drawing, industriously outlining Gracie's uplifted arm, when Edna arrived upon the scene, and looking over his shoulder with critical eyes observed that the sketch had not made much progress to-day; then she told him that her brother Frank had asked her to tell him he was waiting for him in the billiard-room.

Cyril remarked that they had both been talking and the heat being so oppressive, one felt disinclined for work of any sort. Gracie remained silent till Edna remarked anxiously;

"Why, Gracie darling, your cheeks are unusually flushed. I hope, my pet, that you have not been making yourself over-tired posing for Mr. Clifford this hot day. Has she?" questioned Edna, severely, turning upon the young clergyman with a pretended air of displeasure.

"No, Miss Esbourne," he answered calmly, looking into her face with his quiet gaze as he spoke in an easy manner. "I assure you that we did not come out upon the lawn till nearly five, and have done little else but talk since we arrived."

"It is much cooler here than indoors, Edna," volunteered Gracie. "I do not want to go in yet, dear. You sit down and talk to us now." And the young girl drew her sister's hands towards her and as Cyril rose and offered her his seat, Frank's whistle sounded

from the stables and Cyril immediately gathered up his drawing materials, and excusing himself to Edna and Gracie, strode across the lawn, leaving them alone together.

While Edna stood watching the young Englishman's receding form with a thoughtful look upon her brow, Gracie scanned her sister's face anxiously, for the quick observant eyes of the child noticed that there was a gravity about the mouth and a steady light in the dark eyes which were only seen there when Edna was more deeply stirred than usual. At first Gracie wondered if Edna had witnessed the little scene between herself and Cyril, and, innocent though it was, disapproved of the familiarity; and in any case she intended to tell Edna all about how it happened, for the clear open mind of the young girl could not endure to harbor the least thing that approached concealment, especially from her well-beloved sister. So with a quick indrawing of her breath Gracie nerved herself for this little ordeal and, catching Edna's hand, she drew her towards her, saying softly, half-pleadingly :

"Ed-na !"

"Yes, darling. What is it ?" asked Edna, as she turned round quickly, and bending over the child pushed the hair back from her temples. Then seeing the cluster of crimson roses nestling over Gracie's ear, she touched them lightly, saying laughingly—

"Why, you vain little maiden ! What is this for ? Is this some of Cyril's attempts to paint the rose ? Eh, Gracie ?"

"No ! of course not, Edna," she answered, coloring more deeply as she hastily snatched the spray of unoffending blossoms from her hair and with a swift impulsive movement cast them from her, adding : "I only put them there myself for fun."

"Still, dear, that is no reason why you should treat the lovely blossoms so unkindly, even if they have served their turn in adding loveliness to that which is already lovely," and she picked up the discarded spray and placed it in her waist belt.

"Do you really mean that, Edna?" asked Gracie, looking up into her sister's face wistfully.

"Mean what, my pet?" asked Edna.

"What you said just now."

"Why, that you are lovely? Yes, of course I do. Who could look at you and not see it; and seeing, be not tempted to say so?" responded Edna, with a smile at Gracie's evident confusion, for she half suspected the cause, though she was wise enough not to admit it.

"Well — that —," began Gracie, hesitatingly, "that was what Cyril was saying just before you came up; he—he—" another pause, and Gracie tugged nervously at the lace of her sleeve, not looking at Edna and trying to muster up courage to complete her little confession, when Edna exclaimed as she pinched the girl's flushed cheek softly:

"Oh! indeed, and was the Rev. Cyril admiring my little flower-queen, too? Then he has an eye for the beautiful, and knows how to worship at altars other than those at which duty will demand his service and adoration! Well," continued Edna in softer tones, "I will forgive him so long as he is content to worship afar off, for I am selfish enough to want my goddess all to myself for a little longer. I now have but her at whose feet I can lay my heart's worship, and I could not bear to think that anyone else should take her from me, at least, not yet—not yet," she faltered. "The day may come sooner than we know when we may have to part, but—but—"

"Oh! Edna! Edna! What are you saying? What do you mean by being parted? Edna, Edna, you would never leave me! I could not bear it, indeed I couldn't," exclaimed Gracie, flinging her arms around her sister's neck and looking into her face with tearful wonder in her great blue eyes.

The child had forgotten all her own little troubles and her contemplated confession at the very thought of ever being parted from the sister she loved; to Gracie nothing could be worse: no trouble more

terrible ; and this Edna knew but too well, and it was a strong factor with her when she had first been impelled to follow the promptings within her heart to go forth into the world with her message of new life and love. This helpless little sister had been the one solace of Edna's lonely years when she returned to her girlhood's home with all the love of her life cast back upon herself. Gracie's deep affection and dependence upon Edna had given her something to love and live for ; something human upon which to pour out all the stored-up mother love that is in every true woman's heart, only waiting to be awakened into life by the touch of baby fingers and the kisses of baby lips.

So, to be separated from Gracie was the only wrench that could be given to Edna's heart-strings now ; for they were twined round that frail young life very closely since her own bereavement. She often wondered how she should ever have the courage to carry out her project if it should entail parting from her sister Grace. Unless—yes, there was an alternative—unless she could be instrumental in restoring her darling to health and physical strength again. Then perhaps they could go together—one in life, heart, and purpose to proclaim the good tidings more joyously, more triumphantly, because of the wonderful restoration which the Spirit would effect in that now helpless form, through faith in the promise given by Jesus Christ.

“ Listen to me, Gracie, dearest,” interposed Edna when she had soothed her sister's fears. “ I have come to have a talk with you about a wonderful idea which has been revealed to me lately. It is something which you will perhaps not understand all at once, but even should you not, still I want you to trust me and give yourself up to it. That is to leave your mind open to receive the Truth, which I am convinced will be manifested through you later. I must tell you, dear,” continued Edna, seating herself by Gracie's couch, “ that I have had it strongly impressed upon my mind during my hours in the Silence that your spine *can*

be strengthened and your whole body restored to health and vigor again ; in fact, that you can be made as well as you were before you met with your accident."

"But, Edna, how can that be?" ejaculated Gracie, her look and tone revealing the surprise which, was made deeper by the very evident gravity of Edna's words and manner. "You know that all the doctors say my case is hopeless!"

"Yes, I know," assented Edna, "and while we continue to think it is so, then hopeless it will remain."

"Then you really think there is some hope for me, Edna?"

"While there is life there is hope, and my little sister is very much alive with the Life of the Spirit of Christ, and that is the Spirit which will surely heal and save you," replied Edna.

Then she told Gracie about her wonderful experience with Mr. Northbrook ; related the whole of it in detail just as it had occurred ; how strongly she had been impressed with this revelation and how she had gone away the previous Sunday afternoon and searched the Scriptures for her authority in believing that the idea was not impossible ; then how they had only the more convinced her that she was right in concluding that "all things were indeed possible *if they would only believe.*" There lay the crucial test ; and that was where she was eager to have Gracie's assurance of Faith, since in this was the kernel of the matter and on that faith depended the success of the experiment. Then Edna went on to explain how strongly it had been impressed upon her that what had been done by the power of the Spirit in the case of Mr. Northbrook could surely be done for Gracie also. "For," added Edna, "the Lord's arm is not shortened, He is indeed able to save to the uttermost all those who put their trust in Him. Now, Gracie, that is just your case, 'the uttermost,' or as it has been termed by surgeons and doctors, 'hopeless'!"

"Oh! Edna, it seems too good to be true!" gasped Gracie.

“Is anything too hard for the Lord? No, dear, surely not! Since if He is able to save the soul, how much more able to save the body in which that immortal soul dwells? Don't you see that it is an insult to God: the Almighty and Omnipotent One, for us to conclude that His power is limited; that He has no control over the temples which He made, though not with hands, and yet that He can deal as He will with the dwellers therein? Surely, dear, we can believe that the Lord of all the earth can restore this body He made to its original state, that is, perfect as He did create it by the power of the Spirit of Life and of His own divine Essence. He has given us dominion over the body (or the earth, as it is termed) and it is for us to save and heal our bodies by the power of the indwelling Spirit which is within every man, and giveth him understanding. You know the power of thought is the healing, saving power of God in and through Man. Gracie, dearest,” urged Edna in earnest tones, “can you not see that it is only while we persist *in thinking* He cannot save, heal and restore our bodies as well as our souls that we continue to suffer from all the ills of the flesh—which are the plagues of Egypt—and so we are weak, diseased, sinful or deformed? You know that in our real self—our God-Self—we are perfectly whole, without spot or blemish; and if we are true in thought to that real and *Only Self* we must picture forth only that purity, perfection and holiness, or wholeness, on every plane of our being. Then, Gracie, this can only be done from *within*; and that is a process of transmutation by the power of Thought. It is done by centering our mind upon the inward Self; the One Perfect Man which alone can express God our only Good; and when we can see in ourselves only One Man, nothing else, and the name of that One MAN is Jesus Christ, God's Only Son (for nothing short of His perfection can be the Son of God) nothing less can manifest God in us. Now you see, little sister, that when we refuse to look with our mental eyes upon anything short of perfection, we

bring into visibility the state which we desire to see expressed. Then the Spiritual Self puts on a fleshly self—or coat of skin—like unto the plan-man which you hold in your mind ; and thus you gradually build into the outer man a harmonious semblance of the inner Man who is the Lord of your being and very Very God ! ”

Gracie had listened with her whole soul, while the great violet eyes shone with a new hope, inspired by the divine enthusiasm from her sister's countenance, for in it shone the light of a great and holy purpose. Then Gracie cried eagerly, as Edna ceased speaking :

“ Oh ! Edna, how wonderful it all seems ! And you really, really believe it is possible. Only to think that while I have been lying here all these years quite helpless, God could have made me well and strong had we only known the right way ; and without doctors, too : only by the power of Himself used by me through thinking about it the way you have just explained ! ”

“ I am convinced that it is possible, Gracie,” affirmed Edna. “ I feel the truth of it here (laying her hand upon the centre of her breast as she spoke) and if you will only believe with me—just have faith and trust Him wholly to keep His word to us, in this as in any other thing—I know He *can*, and *I feel He will* ! ”

“ Oh ! do tell me how, Edna,” exclaimed Gracie, “ I will do anything that will make me able to walk about like other girls ! ”

“ I have already told you, darling, how,” replied Edna, “ but you know the realization and co-operation has to come from us. He is eternally waiting within our souls to do all things that we earnestly desire, for He knows the thoughts and intents of the heart. Now, Gracie, if you can only believe that in the same way as you would believe that our father would get any surgeon in Australia or elsewhere to come here and cure your spine if you thought it could be done by that one, and asked him seriously to do so ; then, that very same kind of trust applied to your Heavenly Father

will bring the desired boon and blessing we crave just as surely, if we but ask sincerely and *expect it*. Now do you believe and understand all I have said, Gracie ? ” concluded Edna, gravely.

“ I do, Edna, you have made it all so simple that I wonder we did not think about those things in that way before. I am only too anxious to do what you say, if you will help me, dear Edna,” answered Gracie, lifting her eyes wistfully to her sister’s face.

“ That is just what I am here for, dearie. That is the reason I have come to have this talk with you, because I intend to treat you mentally and spiritually for perfect strength, as I did Mr. Northbrook for perfect consciousness ; believing and expecting that in like degree will it be given to you. So every day, dear, night and morning, I will come to you without fail ; never mind what happens, and together we will sit in the Silence and, shutting the doors of our five senses, exclude the outside world and, retiring into the inner sanctuary of our souls, there dwell in positive thought upon the perfection and strength we desire to see expressed in your body. Together we will unite to build by Thought this tower of strength to support your weakened spine. Now every thought will be as a brick in the edifice, so we must be very careful not to allow one weak or faulty brick to slip in unawares. One, even one such, would cause the whole structure to totter and fall ; it would be like ‘ the house built upon the sand ’ when the floods came. So there must not be a flaw in its foundations. Now, dear, what I propose to do is to build every day quietly, steadily, faithfully ; moment by moment ; hour by hour ; day by day, even into weeks and months if it take that period to build these bricks of Thought with the trowel of Faith into your Earthly Temple ; and so make your new house—or body visible. It will be like the coral insect, which builds its islands in mid-ocean. We must exercise that same patience and steady perseverance, since it will not do to build to-day and pull down to-morrow by neglect, carelessness, or error thoughts

of failure. We *must* not, we *will* not fail. Do you understand and grasp it, Gracie?"

"Yes, yes, what a splendid idea! It makes me eager to start building at once. How soon may we begin, Edna?" she cried.

"When you are fully prepared to give me all your attention and co-operation. Then we shall lose no time in seeking the Spirit for strength and healing in faith and earnest supplication," replied Edna, gently stroking the little hand that lay in hers.

"Oh! I am ready whenever you are," responded Gracie.

"Very well, I will come to you to-night after they have all said good-night to you, and there in your room we shall start your first mental treatment," affirmed Edna.

"Do you know, Edna, that what you said just now about pulling down the structure as fast as we build it up reminds me of what Cyril was reading to me yesterday from Homer's 'Odyssey.'"

"What was that, dear? Has he been initiating you into the classics also?" queried Edna, with a smile.

"Yes, and I like the 'Odyssey' so much better than the 'Iliad,'" announced Gracie. "But the part I was thinking about was that relating to Penelope's web, which she always unravelled by night as fast as her maidens worked it by day. That is like what you said our Thought-building would be if we made any error-bricks, wouldn't it?"

"Yes, and the association of ideas is very good," assented Edna, "then the simile you have applied casts a new light upon that great work of the blind poet; since it is evidently intended to convey a lesson to us in regard to our daily thoughts and actions. That we should not do by day anything we would wish undone by night, or *vice versa*. However, Gracie, you and I are not going to emulate Penelope, since we are most anxious to get our Tower of Strength—or New

Garment—completed so that you may wear this beautiful new Soul-robe as soon as possible.”

“ And I am to start and help you make this new robe of flesh to-night, you said, Edna ? ” she rejoined, in eager anticipation.

“ Yes, dear, to-night. But I must ask you to promise me one thing first.”

“ What is it, Edna ? ”

“ You must not talk about this to anyone. Only our two selves are to know about these healing treatments. It is too sacred a thing and one which must not be lightly discussed and perhaps scoffed at by those who do not understand the workings of God’s Spirit. Though they may love us, and are all that is good, and have religious principles according to the laws of the Church, they would not know what it meant for us to take Jesus Christ’s promise to ourselves ; and on the strength of that promise, ‘ whatsoever ye shall ask believing, ye shall receive,’ go with childlike faith and humility to our Father and claim its fulfilment. I think you understand my request, Grace, do you not ? ” questioned Edna, seriously.

“ Quite,” asserted Grace, “ and I promise you I’ll be as silent as a mute.” Then as Edna began to gather up the rugs preparatory to wheeling the couch indoors, Gracie said pleadingly, “ Please, Edna, do tell me what you meant a while ago when you spoke about our parting. Edna, you would never leave me, would you ? ”

“ No, my darling, no. I could never leave you only to be about my Father’s business and to do His will,” and Edna stooped over and kissed the face of the child tenderly.

“ Then,” affirmed Grace, in a tone of assurance, “ then the Lord will never take you away till He has let you heal me, and when He does that I could go with you also wherever you were called.”

“ You could, my pet,” said her sister gravely. “ That is, if you could be content, like Ruth when she followed Naomi, to make the people I should call mine,

your people also. I think, though, you have already followed your Naomi close enough and far enough along this wonderful path to justify me in believing that my God is your God, too?"

"He is, He is! And when I get better I will follow you whithersoever thou goest, dearest Edna. Only promise you will never leave me?" said the child, beseechingly, as she clung around Edna's neck.

"Never willingly, my love. But there now, we will talk about those matters another time when we are alone, to-night perhaps. There is mother on the verandah beckoning us to go indoors."

Edna was just disengaging herself from Gracie's entwining arms when she caught sight of the abbreviated curl, which had now escaped from among its mates, where Gracie had tucked it away hurriedly; but now its shortened strands revealed the mutilation it had suffered from Cyril's knife.

"Oh! Gracie," ejaculated Edna, in dismay, "what have you been doing to your hair? Why did you cut off that front curl?"

"I didn't, I ——" Gracie stammered, then flushed crimson, and, noticing her mother approaching, she whispered entreatingly, "Please hush, Edna! It's all right, don't say anything now. I will tell you about it when we are alone to-night."

With a smile and a dexterous touch the elder sister quietly concealed the short lock among its longer companions, just as Mrs. Esbourne came up asking why they remained out so long; did they not know it was dinner time and neither of them ready?

With a laughing apology for their dilatoriness, Edna gathered together the scattered rugs and books and accompanied her mother as they wheeled the invalid's chair indoors, while Mrs. Esbourne gave them the latest reports concerning Mr Northbrook's improved condition, adding that "she hoped to be able to have him brought up to the homestead by Christmas Day."

CHAPTER XXII.

WAVES OF HEALING THOUGHT.

"The immediately possible is hardly worth living for. It is the ideal that kindles enthusiasm, and gives inspiration and vigor to all human effort."

—R. W. DALE.

That same night, according to promise, at Gracie's retiring hour, when the good-nights had been said, Edna came to the invalid as usual. All being completed, and Gracie quietly settled in bed, Edna sat down by the side of her sister and opening the book which she had brought with her—the one on Mental Suggestion—read Gracie a portion therefrom. She laid the book open on her lap, with the words

"GOD IS MY LIFE"

in large capitals, filling the whole of the open page, on which the lamp light fell clearly, causing the words to stand out boldly before the eyes of both those earnest young seekers after Truth, Life and Health; all of which they recognised as the gifts of God, and as God is each and all these, and more, to mankind, they were in reality seeking God Himself.

The closing words which Edna read were:—"The heart-throb of God pulsates through humanity. Life is a continuous divine communication. Life can never die or diminish. External forms change but *life* goes on. Man is a *living soul*. As a child of God I deny limitation and claim my heritage. God is life, and Life is All. Life, Eternal Life, is mine, and it fills my whole being. God is my LIFE."

When Edna's voice uttered these last words there was a silence for a few moments in the room; then she resumed quietly, and in reverent tones: "Now, Gracie, I want you to follow me very carefully while I instruct you as to the way I purpose attempting this Divine Healing in the name of the Lord. First of all I would teach you the way to seek Our Father in the Silence. This is the true prayer as Jesus taught us to pray; and in this way we are each, you and I, in

unison of thought and purpose, going to seek the Father Himself for ourselves, and ask Him to heal you and raise you up to health and strength of body. Now you will try and concentrate your thoughts and wishes upon this one great desire, and do as I direct you. Will you ? ”

“ Yes, Edna ! ” Gracie assented quietly, her blue eyes fixed calmly yet inquiringly upon Edna’s gravely earnest countenance.

“ You know that I am striving very hard to find and know my very deepest self : my highest Self ; because to know oneself thoroughly is to discover All there is to know. It is in truth to know God : the All in the ALL. Now I am seeking to know *that* I AM, so as I shall also know *What* I AM. I may yet be a long way from the desired goal of my aspiring soul, but I keep on seeking and climbing, and this opens to me each day something new ; as wider vistas unfold themselves before my wondering gaze, I get a fresh view of the Infinite. Now to let you know how these revelations are found, I must explain to you, dear, my method of seeking, and as it is the only way I know as yet, and so far has proved most effectual, I want to make it quite plain to you also, and help you to develop by practice the same powers within you as I am daily finding hidden within my own being. Thus you and I will gradually learn to explore the wonders of this as yet undiscovered country : our Inner Kingdom, which Jesus called ‘ The Kingdom of Heaven within you. ’ ”

Gracie was deeply interested in all that Edna said, and listened most attentively while she continued saying :

“ You know, love, that this Higher Thought teaches us that the holy of holies is within our own soul ; in other words, it is the Chamber of Peace which is dedicated to ‘ Melchizedek ’ King of Salem, who is Priest of the Most High God, and dwells within that sanctuary of our own being. He administers the bread and wine of the Spirit to us after we have fought

the battle with the kings—four against five—and that means the four states of consciousness against the five senses. Abraham represents the soul that by Faith overcomes, and when the stress and worries of struggle for the highest against the lowest is finished, this Prince of Peace in the Sanctuary ministers to the weary Soul, rest, substance, and the wine of Life."

"Oh! Edna," exclaimed Gracie enthusiastically, "what a splendid idea! Why, dear, that makes us each and every one Abrahams, and each can fight the battle of the kings, and then meet our Melchizedek. May we not?"

"Yes, that undoubtedly is what the story of the Bible is meant to convey. The characters there are only representative, and stand for every soul in the universe, who must do likewise if he would win the power and dominion promised to Man from the beginning," responded Edna.

"Why, Edna, then the Bible has two meanings surely?"

"Yes, a spiritual and a literal. The literal is first, or, as the Gospel states, 'The Letter alone killeth and the Spirit giveth life.' Now the spiritual reading of the story is the Life of the Word, and is for you and me, as much as for the Jews, while the literal is historical and allegorical also. Every character is there as an example for all souls, and read as your history and mine; and also the history of every one of the Children of God, making it a living word of God to all, as well as the most wonderful Book in the world."

"Then I will read it in future with new interest and try and find what there is in it that applies to me. I will be an Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in turn, and endeavor to discover what was in their lives that resembles mine to-day," asserted Gracie determinedly.

"You will find all you look for, my darling, but do not stop your researches at Jacob, go right on, for it is all yourself, till you come to the manhood of your soul which is the Jesus of the New Testament, and this will show you the whole history of your journey

back to God from whom you came ; till you return into the bosom of the Father, as did the Beloved Son, Christ."

" Oh ! Edna, tell me how I am to do that ? I am so very anxious to know more of these wonderful things about which I have heard you talk so much, and which I understand a little, though very indistinctly just now," cried Gracie, eagerly catching Edna's hands in hers.

" That is just why I am here, eager and willing to do as much as lies in my power, for I am but a child in our Father's kingdom as yet, little sister. However, if you will be very quiet I will explain how I have tried to follow Jesus' instructions in finding Our Father. Prayer is, as you know, true Aspiration for the highest and greatest good. Jesus taught us how to pray when He said " Enter into thy closet (the secret heart of thy being) and when thou hast shut the door (the doors of the five senses, that no intruding thoughts may enter thereby), pray to thy Father which is in secret (by aspiration, pure desire, in silence and thanksgiving of heart, not with lips only), and thy Father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly." Now we believe that health, wisdom, strength, happiness, and all things needful come from the Father, and are promised by Christ to be added unto those who seek Him in spirit and in truth. This seeking first the Kingdom gives us dominion and power over all things, that is over all the desires of the lower self ; and over every inharmonious condition of body, mind, soul and spirit, till we become perfect on all planes as our Father in Heaven is perfect. To follow the command of Jesus I have retired daily to my own room alone, detaching myself from everyone and everything for half an hour or more if possible ; to be alone with God our Father in *The Silence*. Then I take up a restful position, relax all my physical body, and breathe deeply and rapidly for a few minutes. The next thing is to shut out all thoughts of care and worry, close the mind's door against all sensation of the physical, mental

or moral imperfections: see yourself perfect as the child of God. When calm and peaceful I then take a thought such as "God is my Life," as we have just read; or say, mentally, 'Omnipresence, manifest Thyself through me,' and I hold the thought there in my mind to the exclusion of all others, and concentrate upon it: give myself up to it wholly and so endeavor to realize what it means to me. Yet it is not well to try too hard to think the thought; it is better to allow the thought to think itself through you; to let it fill you, pulsate through your being; flow through your veins like the life-blood, till gradually a sweet rest and peace steals over you, and then you will feel the Infinite Life vibrating through you: the Infinite Mind thinking through you; and the Infinite Love loving through you; till Life, Strength, and Love overflows your entire being, and you feel that God is indeed in His Holy Temple of your body, and all the earth (earthly thoughts) must keep silence before Him. I use this method of prayer every day to ensure the success I have so far won, and which has been a daily growth into wholeness (or holiness). But I have found, dear Gracie, that I must never allow any discouragement nor fear of failure to find any place in my mentality. I have just kept on trying, praying and waiting on the Lord, and I feel that *I must grow*, that *I am growing*. Daily, I am realizing my Oneness with the Infinite and that I am a perfect child of the Living God in my real Being. This is the Christ-Way to the Truth, which is Life eternal; and 'the Life of Christ is our Life; the Power of Christ is our Power; the Wisdom of Christ is our Wisdom; and in *my* Christ within me, and your Christ within you, is the fulness of the God-head bodily complete.' Everyone can say that as we do to-night, dear Gracie, for every Soul is *Man*, and *MAN* is God individualized. This is the Power of God for our Salvation. Every Soul has the Temple of Peace within, and to that temple I wish you to repair with me now, you to yours, and I to mine; but they are both one, for God the

Omnipresent Wisdom and Love reigneth in both, and Melchizedek, the Priest of the Most High, presideth at each altar in the Holy of Holies. I have explained carefully the way, and now, dear, I want you to adopt the mental attitude I have described, every time I come to treat you, for this is the truest way to let God work in and through us. Just to 'be still and know that I AM God.' God in yourself willing to do His good pleasure without any interference on the part of your personal self. Do you understand and believe this, dearest?" asked Edna.

"Yes, I am sure I do, because I really think that is the state of mind and body I am unconsciously in when I get my visions, and it is then all my best thoughts come to me," answered Gracie.

"Very possibly it is, love," assented Edna. "For that reason I am convinced that you will, by your very receptivity, be able to help bring about the results we so earnestly desire to see expressed by God through you: His perfection made manifest in your flesh."

"Well, it is not conscious help that I shall be giving at first, you know, Edna," protested Gracie, "but I am so anxious to help, that I shall follow your instructions as closely as I can, though I may be very imperfect in my first attempts."

"You will just give yourself up to the will of the Spirit; that is all you are asked to do at first, dear, be receptive and believing: He will do the rest."

"Well, that is how I am in my vision times," returned Gracie, "I really do nothing at all but be quite still and let things show themselves to me, or perhaps they pass like moving pictures before my mental eyes."

"I understand, dear," rejoined Edna, "but now what I want you to do is to try and assume the same attitude of passivity, only to shut the door of your mind upon all those things or 'pictures' and see *only God*; or that condition of complete health, strength, power, and perfection that expresses the

highest. See Christ as the manifestation of the Father of every soul, enthroned in your flesh; and ask that your body may show forth that same perfection in each and every organ; ask that the Omnipresent Life of all Life may manifest Itself through you, and as we know God is pure Life and is your Life, then your life is as the Life of God—*Perfect*.

"We have just read these words '*God is my life*'" (pointing as she spoke to the open page on her lap) "and what we will do is to take a mental photograph of those words; imprint them upon our mind, think calmly what they mean to you, see only that Perfect Life of the Omnipresent Father filling every portion of your body, since being Omnipresent He must therefore fill all space, there is no room for you and so no actual imperfection. It is All God; for He is the only reality in oneself."

"Why, Edna, that is what is meant in those verses '*Illusion*,' which I copied for you. Is it not?" queried Gracie softly.

"Yes, my pet, you certainly grasped the idea there in a very idealistic fashion. Will you now try and do the same again: applying the thought to your own fleshly temple, and see God dwelling therein, as you saw Him in space with you alone, as described in the verses."

"Yes, I will, Edna," affirmed Gracie, reverently clasping her hands on her breast and closing her eyes, as she beheld Edna doing, and after a few moments' silence the elder sister repeated slowly, softly, the words, "All is God, all is God. God is everywhere. You are in His presence now, this very moment His sweet strong beautiful Spirit fills every atom of your being. His Spirit is all around you like the sunshine; you are bathed in it. Spirit is your health, your strength, your vigor. You are white with the glory of God shining over you and through you. You are a living witness of God's perfect health, strength and love. Let that perfect health now be made manifest in every organ of your body; let perfect strength

be expressed by you ; let divine Love now fill you till you show forth the glory of the Father and stand out as a living witness of His Almighty Power and go forth to living, loving service for the world. The Lord keep you and bless you, and cause His face to shine upon you and give you strength and peace, in the name of Jesus Christ the Perfect Son and Example ; I affirm that the Life of God is revealed in you for *God is your Life.*"

The closing words fell from Edna Esbourne's lips in a gentle whisper : not more than a breathed thought, and at the same moment a deep sigh of sweet content, that spoke peace and rest, escaped Gracie's lips as both sisters simultaneously relapsed into silent meditation, and concentrated their minds upon the one aspiration, the true prayer of their yearning souls : to seek and find the Great Physician who would heal and restore the little sufferer to health and life—abounding life.

At length it struck the quarter past ten by the large clock in the hall before Edna or Gracie stirred from their Prayer of Silence. Then quietly, softly, the elder sister rose and bent over the sweet girlish face on the white pillow, listened for a moment or two to the soft breathing, and discovered that Gracie slept : calmly, sweetly, peacefully wrapped in a quiet slumber, the delicate eyelids closed over the beautiful eyes and a smile of sweet rest and holy calm upon her lips ; folded in the arms of Infinite Peace, and Life.

Edna turned the night-light low and stood for a few moments in silent contemplation of the little sleeper. Presently her lips moved almost inaudibly, and these half-whispered words fell from them :

" Heavenly Father, I thank Thee that Thou dost hear Thy children when they call upon Thee. I know and believe that Thou hast heard our prayer this night, and that in Thine own good time Thou wilt answer us and give us the desire of our heart : life and strength for her. Father, I thank Thee that this Thy child, and my sister Gracie Esbourne, is perfectly

whole in her real being, and expresses Thy perfect health and strength; that she is well as Thou hast created her. And now, Father, Thou wilt prove it according to Thy word and our Faith in the power of that Word. We ask it in the name of Jesus Christ the Divine Lord of our being, whose perfect peace enfolds this Thy child. Amen."

With soft and quiet movements Edna gave one or two touches to Gracie's bed, and drawing the curtains, shaded the night light from the face of the peaceful little sleeper; then softly left the room by the verandah door, firmly believing that the power of God was working out to a successful issue the much desired good, which they had together so earnestly prayed and faithfully hoped for. Though this was but the first night of the treatment, that was to prove a test of Faith to them both, Edna felt certain that the Lord would indeed bring it to pass.

After leaving Gracie's room, Edna crossed the lawn and passed down the walk between the rows of tall shade-trees where she had met Roger Northbrook that memorable night preceding the picnic and his accident which had supervened. She had never been there alone at evening since, and to-night as she strolled quietly beneath the trees again, her soul filled with a great desire, and a strange strong hope that it would be fulfilled: her mind suddenly recalled that scene beneath the pale light of a midnight moon. A scene which was indelibly imprinted upon her memory, and had opened the eyes of her soul's inner vision, and (must she admit it, even to herself?) yes; had also stirred the depths of her heart to its secret centre, as those depths had never been stirred before.

There was no moon to-night, but as the girl stood beneath the interlacing boughs she gazed up into the star-spangled canopy and there beheld, right over her head, the beautiful Southern Cross, which lay on its side, and its three brightest stars outshone all those around them, while the fainter fourth seemed to wane and fade and then suddenly brighten while she watched;

and her imaginative mind caused her to fancy it was as a symbol of hopes to be realized. The Cross was complete but not yet erect before her, which, to her, signified that she was not yet prepared for her final work: the crucifixion of her personal self and all her personal desires; that she was not yet ready to stand the wrench from all she loved, and all who loved her, for the sake of the Lord, and offer herself as a willing sacrifice to the service of suffering humanity. Therefore, because the Cross was not standing upright before her in the sky when she looked upon it that auspicious night, when her mind was cherishing great hopes, her heart swelling with a great love, pure, holy, and undefiled by anything earthly; and her soul was overflowing with great longings, longings that could not be uttered; this she took as a silent token of her need for patience and prayerful preparation. "Perhaps," she thought, "I shall yet have to weep tears of bitterness and sorrow in dark Gethsemane's Garden, before I shall be found worthy to hang upon that Cross and suffer a social and spiritual Crucifixion: a dreaded Golgotha."

Edna Esbourne was fully aware of the fact that she would have to face a severe trial, a great test of her faith in her new-found God. One that would require her to exercise great fortitude and to learn how to suffer and be strong in her trust in that God whose power was expressed through her Divine Lord, the Higher Self of her Being. But she believed that she would be enabled to face the future and all it held for her now without flinching, since she had learned where to flee for safety and strength and help in time of trouble and doubt.

Edna knew that she might yet have to choose between giving up those she loved, or remaining steadfast to what she knew was the way of truth and righteousness. Those who loved her and who were her natural loves would not and could not yet understand this new life and what it meant to her. They would probably laugh to scorn what they considered her fad, and would consider it fanaticism on her part for

adhering to such an intangible myth, as this new inner life would naturally appear to those who were quite incapable of even comprehending it, or trying to grasp its basic principles and grand truths.

She could not, however, dare to judge them, or even complain of their want of sympathy, knowing, as she had learned by her own experience, that each one must come to that same altitude of soul growth to be capable of understanding what it means to another. That until this is effected they will remain deaf and blind to the great revelations that have been made to that other soul ; and in their very ignorance will sit in judgment upon it. This is the Judgment Hall of Pilate which is in the world to-day as much as when Jesus walked in Jerusalem. It has to be passed through by every soul that has reached that plane beyond the comprehension of those on the old level who see only the objective, not the subjective and eternal. This is a trial which has to be gone through, the world demands it, and asks us for proofs of our Truth ; and unless that soul be well equipped beforehand by nights of silent prayer, and able to say " Thy Will be done," it will need much more than human courage to face the scoffs and sneers and the coarse jeers of an indignant crowd who can see only the person, and not the Spirit that prompts the sacrifice of self.

But since all Life is a Progress and the Soul must grow, like the tree, once it has burst forth from the hard shell of materiality into the open air of God-Consciousness, and become filled with the life of the Spirit ; then there is no approximate stage at which it can remain fixed for ever. It must go up and on : out of one condition or stage into the next or higher ; not looking backward into the past, else it is liable to stand still, like Lot's wife ; but must ever keep onward, upward and forward towards the goal ; each step revealing to it deeper mysteries for unfoldment ; newer heights to be won ; greater glories to be attained. Then when that soul is able to give up all—all—everything

it holds dear in its human heart—even to the sacrifice of its best beloved, because it is the will of the Lord—when like Abraham it lay its best beloved—its only son—on the altar of sacrifice, then, and only then, does the Lord reveal Himself in all His fulness and say, “Fear not, I am Thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” Then does he bestow a thousandfold more upon it than it relinquished for His sake; to do His Will only, not its own. Thus in giving all, it receives All, and a two-fold blessing from the hand of Love Himself.

These thoughts passed through the mind of the woman as she wandered in the Homestead garden, beneath the silent stars, that warm December night, lost in meditation of the deep things of God. She had made a strong resolve to take a step in the near future which would probably involve all this suffering, and would mean her making a sacrifice equivalent to that which she had just now been musing upon. Her only cause of anxiety was her well-beloved sister Grace; yet these new hopes which she cherished regarding her restoration to health and strength through the power of the Lord and her agency as a mental healer, tended to give courage to her heart and lent her new strength to persevere in her determination to exercise her strongest faith to this end so that when the hour came for her to decide for the new life into which she had elected to enter, Gracie should be well enough to choose to accompany her and follow in her footsteps. Then if Gracie were indeed made well again, what a great cause for rejoicing! Then how much more would she be justified in giving her whole life to the service of Humanity as a thank-offering to the Lord, and proclaim what great and wonderful things He had done for her and hers!

Now, Edna really believed Gracie would be cured of her infirmity, and that the cure would be permanent, for her success with Mr. Northbrook had given her great encouragement. Yet in like manner as it had been years since the vital parts were crippled, it might

take some little time for one so young in the kingdom of truth and power to use the Father's will, and thus build up and renew the wasted tissues and restore the depleted forces of life and energy. Not that Edna did not believe all things were possible to the Lord, but she hardly dared hope that her faith and Gracie's were sufficient to combat all the thought that was against them in the house, apart from the race thought about the power of sickness and disease to hold the body in bondage, which prevailed in the world then. So that Edna was quite prepared to meet with apparent failure at first and not to look for "a miracle," so to speak. Gracie's case would be gradual, yet she never doubted the certainty of its achievement; even though insurmountable obstacles might raise themselves, and apparently militate against ultimate success, Edna was determined to let nothing daunt her: she would go on in spite of all discouragements, since, though she was but a babe in the Truth she knew that Jesus had thanked Our Father, that this was for such. Therefore, Edna was encouraged to hope, and Hope has wings, it uplifts, exhilarates, illumines and gladdens the soul, and that same Spirit of Hope which has brought the soul thus far on its wonderful journey, from sea slime to a manifested god, will also carry that soul on through depths and heights unto glories unknown.

CHAPTER XXIII.

LOVE'S UNREST.

"The future does not come from before to meet us; but comes streaming up from behind over our heads."

—RAHEL LEVIN.

It was Christmas Eve at Honeysuckle Hut, and Roger Northbrook had recovered sufficiently to converse, and soon learned all that had occurred to keep him a prisoner there. When he recognised who was nursing him: that it was indeed Mysia—Mysia Grayson, whom he had loved so ardently for over three

years—he was torn between two passions. At first he impulsively attempted to fold her to his heart, but she drew herself out of his reach and showed by her whole manner and bearing her entire disapproval of any such freedom. Her demeanour tended to convince him that she had not forgiven him, or else had ceased to love him since he had taken her at her word and left her—though he ought to have known that a woman never really means a man to take her at her word. Now she was painfully professional in all she did and said, and each time he attempted to refer to the past she quite ignored his remarks, or else quietly left the room, as a mute reproof to him for disobeying orders, which she had given him on the first morning he was sufficiently conscious to recognise her; and given in such a tone that it was only his determination to find out if she had ceased to care for him which had given him courage to occasionally ignore them. Sometimes he thought she was softening towards him, for her face when in repose wore the old tender expression he knew and loved so well: the sweet blue eyes betrayed in their soft depths the yearning love-light which touched him so keenly, knowing as he now did her life's sad story. But the moment he attempted to speak the words that would recall the past, the stern professional mask fell over the face of the young nurse and she was from that instant no longer the Mysia he knew and loved, but another woman—a stranger.

Roger was greatly puzzled to account for this inexplicable change in one whose nature he thought he knew so perfectly: knew as a tender, clinging and loveable creature. Why had she altered so greatly in a few short years? Had the world used her so harshly as to sour all the love-springs of her being? Then he thought of the husband: the man who had come between them from the beginning, and although he was unaware of the fact, had always been between them. Perhaps Mysia had met him again. He may have returned to her and asked her forgiveness for the years of desertion, and, womanlike, she may have accorded

it ; if not for her own sake, then for the sake of her child. Roger knew how dearly Mysia loved her little son ; might not the child plead more effectually for the erring father than even her heart could for him, another man, and one too, who, had come into her life as a disturber of her peace ? Well, he thought, it was only his deserts that she should have ceased to care for him, but when he recalled that scene at the cottage on Christmas Eve three years ago, he felt certain she had loved him then, even if she had no love for him now.

True, she had a right to condemn him for offering her love that could be none other but an insult to her as a wife and mother : love that could only humiliate her—sincere and true thought it might be—for love, he well knew, to be really worthy of the name, must always uplift. He felt that she was doing right in treating him as she did, if she were really doing it from a sense of duty and womanly virtue ; and he dare not again force his claims. Nevertheless, he could not but feel a little chagrined, for no man likes to think he has lost his throne in the kingdom of a woman's heart. It was at times very hard for him to control himself when day by day and through long nights he watched her by his bedside, a sweet and gracious presence devoting herself untiringly to his comfort, and ministering to him in a thousand womanly ways, yet never to be permitted to reveal to her all that had been and was even now in his heart : not to be able to explain anything regarding the past and his action in renouncing her so easily : things that would have made clear much that was now unaccountable to her.

How he longed again to take her in his arms and hear those dear lips say " I love you," as they had done that Christmas Eve, when in a burst of passionate love he had forced the confession from her rosy mouth and ardently kissed it for the gift ; to let her know how deeply and faithfully he had loved her through all those intervening years, yes, loved her till—yes, even till a few short weeks ago. All this inward

struggle and unsatisfied longing was a severe trial to his moral strength, and a tax upon his patience. But greatly as he desired to say and hear much from Mysia, Roger felt it quite impossible in the face of her present attitude to himself, to approach the forbidden subject, and up to the present he had refrained from even mentioning the name of the man whom she had called husband and who stood like a ghost between them—known, yet unrecognised by either.

Under these circumstances Roger took up an attitude during the early days of his illness which quite bore out Mysia's suspicions, and thus in her gentle loving breast, confusion became worse confounded. She enfolded herself in a cloak of cold reserve towards him, so that the gulf between them widened, and their manner towards each other was so painfully studied and so strictly conventional, that it was unlikely they would be able to continue long under these strained relations and neither of them show the effects. There must be a thaw after this long frost ; and the thaw came that Christmas Eve.

Mysia rose at dawn that December morning and went for a long walk alone in the bush to try and ease her heart of its ache and enable her to bear the strain of the day. It was a day full of memories to her ; memories which had once promised her great joy and happiness three years ago, but had now turned to dust and ashes at her touch. It was dreadful having to act this part to Roger ; to appear to have no feeling towards him, while all the while her heart was breaking, aching, and yearning with a fierce rebellious pain : a pain that seemed to gnaw its very life-cords till she thought they must snap and she would die of that well-known yet most doubtful disease—a broken heart.

Oh ! how she loved him. How she would always love him ! No one, least of all the man himself, could ever conceive the depths of love she bore him. Yet strange, even to her, she found her pride was stronger than her love : stronger than she was able to fight against, though her life's happiness depended upon it.

She loved him with a devotion that absorbed her whole soul ; a love that came between her and everything else on earth ; and that had only one rival—her love for her little son—for there were moments when she dare not think what she would do were she ever called upon to choose between Roger and her child, her little Reggie. This love of Mysia's had been growing steadily for over three lonely years, cherished as a precious thing that would come and bless her life some day : nurtured by tender memories of the past that had not been marred by reality, and so it had grown and grown till now, like a starved wild beast seeing food within its reach, it had become ravenous ; and she feared it would eventually break from its leash. There was, however, one saving power : her pride ; it had saved her before and she thought it would stand this latter test. But when he recovered, was restored to health and strength once again by her tender nursing, would she have the courage to stand aside and see him go out of her life for ever, perhaps into the arms of another woman ? Oh ! she doubted it, she doubted it.

It was a hot morning and she had walked fast in her agitated state of mind and, seating herself upon a fallen log, she rested her head in her hands and groaned aloud in a despairing tone :

“ O, my God ! how terrible is my position ! How cruel the bonds that bind me to a man whom I do not love—never did love—while my heart longs after another. It is a cruel law that forces a woman to act against the best impulses of her soul. Surely God never meant us to live a life of hypocrisy ? But what can it matter to me now, whether it be husband or lover ? Neither desire my love ; neither love me. Reg. has deserted me and Roger has ceased to love me. But though married I am no wife. If love alone is the gateway to marriage, then I am Roger's wife only, and I would rather die than be any other's. Ah ! how I wish I were free, free ——.”

Mysia's ruminations were here interrupted by a

noise like the crackling of twigs among the undergrowth near her, and she started quickly to her feet and looked around, fearing some one might be near or that there were blacks about, of which she was afraid ; but she saw nobody and concluded it must only have been a frightened rabbit. Glancing at her watch, she found that she had stayed out rather long, so, quickening her steps, she hastened back to her patient, but as she crossed the clearing she saw a horseman riding rapidly away from where she had been seated, and concluded that it was one of the boundary-riders looking up stray sheep or cattle, and, hoping he had not overheard her communings, Mysia thought no more of the matter.

Reaching the Hut, she passed through the outer room to her patient, whom she found awake, and after having performed her morning duties for him and given him his breakfast, she went outside to get her own, which Greta had prepared for her. At the door of the little "lean-to" which did duty as a kitchen, Mysia met Sallust, the assistant shepherd, who had been deputed to act as handy man about the place. Sallust was busy carrying in wood for Greta and his arms were full when Mysia met him with a cheery "Good morning!" saying, "I see you are busy, Sallust, and you look hot, too."

"Oh! I'm used to it and thank you, miss. It don't hurt me a bit. It's the likes o' you now, Miss, as 'ud feel 'ard work, I'm thinkin', seein' as you're so delicate-lookin'," returned the man, with a pathetic grin all his own.

Sallust was admittedly a little bit queer and not supposed to be over brilliant of intellect, in consequence of which some of the station hands had christened him "Sawny Sallust," while on account of his penchant for proverbs in and out of season, and which were generally inappropriate to the subject, he had earned for himself the more euphonious cognomen of "Solomon Sallust." But he was a good reliable fellow, most willing to do anything that was required of him and

more if possible. Mysia pitied the poor fellow's mental deformity, and valued him for his goodness and the tender handling he gave the invalid. Being exceptionally strong, he could lift Roger quite easily so that he was invaluable to her when she had occasion to move her patient. For this alone, if nothing else, Mysia appreciated him and would not have him exchanged for any other, though both Mr. and Mrs. Esbourne had urged that he was not capable of filling all the needs of the male attendant of a sick room. Mysia, however, stoutly refused to part with her major-domo, for she had already proved his worth and appreciated him accordingly, while the man also returned her liking in his own queer fashion, for he was her most devoted slave and followed her about like a dog.

It was to please Nurse Mysia that he had dug up a bit of garden in front of the Hut and planted it with some sweet-scented annuals which he had obtained from the gardener at the Homestead, and so had improved the appearance of the quaint little bush hospital. He had trained the wild honeysuckle over the rough slab walls and brought some fine stag-horn and elk-horn ferns from the distant gullies with which to brighten the bare spots around the doorway. He went all her messages between the Hut and the Homestead with a promptitude and thoughtfulness worthy the highest praise ; and never forgot the fresh fruit and flowers which were sent to them every morning, gathered by Edna's own hands—a labor of love also. By these unselfish efforts on the part of poor Sallust, the Hut had been transformed from a bare-looking slab shanty into a bower of beauty and simple comfort, all revealing the artistic touch of a woman's hands, while the family from the Homestead were not slow to notice the improvements, and constantly contributed something themselves to the general effect when they visited the invalid and his dainty nurse.

On this occasion when Sallust paused to answer Mysia's remark he had placed his bundle of wood at his feet and stood before her with his tattered felt

hat in his hands, twirling it between his fingers and thumbs in a nervous uncertain fashion, while nurse said, with her usual gentle smile—

“Did you remember to ask for the extra milk this morning, Sallust?”

“Oh! yes, Miss, certain I did,” replied the man, with a broad grin of satisfaction at his own smartness.

“That is good, thank you, Sallust.”

“And Mistress said as I was to tell yer that yer needn’t ever go short,” he added triumphantly, his round face and big sheepish eyes beaming with pleasure as he spoke. Then he said, “Please, Miss, will yer look at that and say if it’ll suit yer?”

Mysia followed his eyes and saw he referred to a large tree-fern which he had secured as another addition to the adornment of their little establishment.

“How good and thoughtful you are, Sallust, to be sure,” cried Mysia, as she went across the yard to examine it. “What a fine specimen it is, too,” she observed with an approving nod and smile, which brought a glow of honest pleasure to the fellow’s ruddy face.

“Thank yer, Miss, but I hopes yer knows I’m never likely to forget anything that yer asks fer? And if yer please, will yer say where yer’l ’ave it put? ‘A place fer everything and everything in its place,’ the copy-books say,” he added, with a grin at his own wisdom in bringing in one of his proverbs, but on this occasion as it happened it applied better than was usually the case with his coruscations of wit.

Smiling at his remark, Mysia said (indicating a spot with the toe of her shoe just in front of the back door of the hut), “I think you had better plant it here, it will hide that unsightly stable yonder.”

“Yes’m and so it will for ‘andsome is as ’andsome does.’” Then picking up his bundle of wood, he took it indoors and hurried off to get his spade and plant the fern, using an alacrity in his movements that was a strange contradistinction to his sloth of mind. When he returned, spade in hand, and stood beside the

nurse, who was examining the fronds of the very fine specimen of *Alsophila australis*, which he had taken great pains to procure for her, Sallust observed, with a wise nod of his large red head—

“That’s a good sort, miss, I knows, ’cause I’ve heered Malpus Brown say a lot about them. He knowed all about plants and suchlike, and their hard names, too. He’s a eddicated man is Malpus and knows the name of most things as grows in the bush. I s’pose it’s on account o’ his being so quiet like and keepin’ to ’isself. He don’t have no company but his books and his horse. He likes them better’n human things.”

“Who is Malpus Brown, Sallust?” asked Mysia, looking at the man’s flushed face as she spoke, for he had grown red with the effort of this long speech and now stood abashed at his own temerity. “I seem to have heard the man’s name frequently since I came here, yet I never see him,” she added.

“Why, miss, Malpus Brown’s the shepherd as lived in this ’ere hut afore the accident turned ’im out,” announced Sallust; then he lifted his eyes with an amused look in their pale blue depths and said, “But lawks! Miss, what’ll he say when he comes back ’ere after yer gone and sees all these changes about his old ’umpy, why, he’ll not be for knowin’ it, I’m thinkin’!” and Sallust chuckled softly.

“But if he’s a man who likes and understands plants and flowers, as you have just stated, he should be pleased, I’m sure,” replied Mysia. Then she added quickly, “Sallust, tell me about Malpus Brown. I’m quite curious to see this strange person. Where is he living now? Why does he never come down this way? He must be a queer fellow not to come and ask after Mr. Northbrook after being good enough to help in getting him here after the accident, as I heard he did. What keeps him away from his hut? Yes, Sallust, I would like to see this mysterious man,” she concluded, with a smile.

“Lawks! Miss, what a lot of questions you’ve

asked me all at once't. I forget where they began now. I'm afraid a poor fellow like me'll have a hard job to answer them right. But they do say, 'Where there's a way there's a will,' and as I'm very willin' I'll try, Miss. The first was—let me see ——" he paused and scratched his head, then with a bright gleam of intelligence said beamingly: "I knows, it was 'Who's Malpus Brown?'"

Mysia nodded and laughed at the puzzled expression his face showed at the task her curiosity had set him, while he now busied himself at digging the hole for the fern.

"As to who's Malpus Brown," he resumed, "well, there's none o' us as can tell yer who *he* is. He's just a Chinese puzzle is Malpus. He's the chief boundary rider, they calls them now, as looks after the sheep, but it used to be 'ead shepherd.' They do say as he's a gentleman, but that's 'cause he's not like the others and don't mix with the rest of the 'ands on the station. He's as standoffish as yer like, too, livin' all by 'isself, and allus readin' books. Hard books they be, too, such like as I couldn't ever make 'ead or tale of neither, though I went to school meself when I was a kid, but they do say, 'Spare the child and spoil the rod,' at least it's in the Bible," he interpolated in such a sage tone of voice that Mysia burst out laughing at his queer application of the proverb to himself.

Her merriment caused Sallust to stop and look up in surprise at her, wondering what he had done to cause amusement, for this had been a particularly long and hard speech for poor Sallust, made to one like Nurse, too; and he tried hard to use his best vocabulary and not to slip into the loose mode of expression that was customary among the shepherds. Having put his best efforts into it he was naturally proud of himself as a conversationalist; so that when she burst into such unexpected mirth, so abashed did the poor lad feel that he shut up instantly. Mysia, however, noticed his concern and to pacify him said lightly and with an encouraging smile—

"It's all right, Sallust, go on with your description. I was only laughing at your funny way of telling things. You certainly are an oracle."

"What's that, Miss?" he ventured, doubtful as to whether it was a term he could accept as a compliment to his genius or otherwise.

"It means a wise man who says wise things, Sallust. Something like Solomon, whom you evidently know a good deal about, if I am to judge by your use of his proverbs," replied Mysia.

"Yes, Miss, and certain I ought'er, for I reads the Bible my mother gave me afore she died, and I knows it says in there that Solomon said 'Go to the ant, thou sluggard.'"

"Quite true, Sallust, but that does not apply to you, for you are no sluggard, of that I have good proof," affirmed Mysia. "Now tell me more about the shepherd, Malpus Brown. You have made me quite curious to hear all there is to know about him. Could you not manage that I might see him some time?"

"Well now, Miss, it'd take someone a long way cleverer than me to let anyone see Malpus Brown if he didn't want them to see him. He's ——."

"Why, Sallust, he did not say he did not want to see me, surely?" exclaimed Mysia.

"No! Oh! no, miss, o' course he didn't, but he's just the rummiest chap you ever did see. The 'boss' 'isself can't make Malpus do a thing unless he wants to. He wouldn't stay and give a 'and here when he was asked ter, but said he'd find fresh diggin's if he was forced to, and they don't want Malpus to go, 'cause he knows his work. Leastways that's what Ben said, and I reckon he oughter know, seein' as 'ow he's been 'ere longest. But, ——," he added, working steadily as he talked, "but as to managin' for yer to see him some-time—well, that's 'ard to say, for 'there's many a slip atween the cup and the lip,' yer knows, Miss, and that's just what's likely to 'appen if I was ter say as how I'd promise you'd see Malpus Brown."

"Why, Sallust," exclaimed Mysia, "you would

make me believe he was an ogre or a Will-o'-the-Wisp, so mysterious are all his ways from what you say."

"Well, Miss, as to his bein' a 'Will-o'-the-Wisp'—as I ain't quite sure as to what that is, I can't speak for certain: but I knows what it is they calls a 'ogre, though I can't say as I've ever seen one meself 'cept in story-books, but I can tell yer that Malpus Brown's pretty much like one o' them things when yer 'appen to cross his temper, and then the best place for yer is to 'fly to the uttermost parts o' the earth!'"

Sallust chuckled to himself as he uttered this last sage remark, evidently recollecting some little episode with the shepherd in which he had himself figured, when he had probably found discretion the better part of valor.

"Why! what does he do, then? He surely does not hurt anyone when he is angry, does he, Sallust?" asked Mysia in surprise.

"Well, 'there's more ways o' killin' a dog than chokin' 'im with butter,' and a look from Malpus Brown goes far enough at any rate to do yer for a month o' Sundays, not to say nothin' about his voice when he speaks."

"What does he say, Sallust? Does he swear, do you mean?"

"No, I can't say as he swears 'ard as swearin' goes, but he can get more out o' a fellow with one o' them looks o' his than them as lets it go all they knows."

"What does he look like?" asked Mysia, smiling and curious.

"Now, Miss, you've asked me somethin' 'ard," said the poor fellow, shaking his head and looking up from his work, which was now almost finished. "I'm not much of a 'and at tellin' what people look like." Then—pausing and leaning upon his spade, and with a puzzled expression upon his face, caused by his effort to gratify the young nurse's curiosity to the best of his ability—continued: "Well, let me see—he's got a thick, black beard and black 'air what curls all over

his 'ead. He looks like a—well, somethin' like one of those big monkeys they call 'a ouratangs'——"

"An ourang-outang, you mean, Sallust," corrected Mysia gently.

"Yes, miss, that's what I said, 'cause he's so 'airy lookin'. Then his eyes—well, it's them as makes yer remember him, they're so sharp and—and 'ave a way o' lookin' at yer as if they seed right into yer 'ead and kind a-knowed what yer were thinkin', and makes yer tell truth even if yer wanted to tell a lie. And—and—," stammered poor Sallust, "well, miss, I don't know as I can tell yer any more, 'cause Malpus Brown's such a 'ard fellow to tell about, not like the other men on the station—they're just 'ands, yer know, and he's so different that one gets a bit mazed."

"All right, Sallust, don't trouble any more, thank you!" said Mysia, "it really doesn't matter at all, I was merely curious to hear about a man whom you all talk so much about but who is never to be seen. But I am not particularly interested, you know. Indeed, the man may be very nice and good if we only knew more about him, and, besides, he may have had some trouble that makes him so peculiar."

"Yes, to be sure, miss," assented Sallust quickly, "that's what they do say 'ere: that Malpus Brown's been crossed in love, so that's what makes him so unsociable like. They do say, too, that a man's never the same once't he's been jilted, because 'True love never runs smooth,' and his must 'a been awfully true, as it's given him some rough 'andling by his looks. At any rate, that's what Ben says, and he knows, 'cause he's been married twice, so knows a lot about such things," concluded Sallust, with an air of conviction as he gave the finishing pats to his now completed task.

Mysia turned away to hide the flush that rose to her brow at the innocent remark of the young fellow, which awakened the memory of her own pain over 'the true love that would not run smoothly' in her own life. Then on her way to the house she asked,

"Did you get any letters for me this morning, Sallust?"

"Lawks! What a head I've got, to be sure," he exclaimed, dropping his spade and fumbling in his many pockets as he spoke, with flustered manner and hasty fingers. "I'm sorry, but I quite forgot about it, miss, after you began to talk to me. Yer wern't 'ere when I got back and I just put it away safe till you'd come, so as I could give it to yer myself, then it clean slipped me." Searching, he drew out a piece of newspaper from his inside shirt pocket and began unwrapping it as though it were jewels, till at length a letter appeared to view, which he handed to Mysia, saying apologetically—

"I hopes as how yer'll excuse me this time, miss, and I'll be more rememberful next time."

"Thank you! Sallust; it's all right, there's no harm done by the delay. I like to get letters at Christmas time, don't you?"

"Yes, miss, when there's anyone to write to me, but I ain't got nobody now," he replied sadly.

"Well, never mind, Sallust, when I go back to town I'll write you a letter myself," said Mysia brightly, as she took her own precious letter and saw that it was from Nurse Connors, who had charge of her little Reggie.

"Oh! Miss, will yer really? Thank yer so much. I'll read it and read it till I know it off by heart," and his eyes showed the pleasure her words gave him.

"Is that all you might want this morning, ma'am?" enquired Sallust.

"Yes, thank you! just at present; I am not quite ready for you to help me with Mr. Northbrook, but will call you when I am," and with these words she turned inside to open and read her precious letter before she attended to her patient; while Sallust went back to his wood-carrying, buttoning up his blue jumper which he had opened to procure the letter he had stowed away in his safest pocket, and whistling softly to himself as he worked.

The letter was full of loving messages and good

wishes for Christmas happiness and peace, from good Mrs. Connors, and her own darling Reggie, who was at home on his holidays and missed his mother very much, asking so pleadingly could she not be home just to let him kiss her "A Merry Christmas!" This period was the longest time they had been separated since he was born, and she felt the forced absence from him very much, especially at this time of the year, when she and Nurse Connors had always striven to make it one of joy and love to the fatherless boy. The little fellow sent her heaps of love and kisses, the latter marked in as crosses with his own hand, and a little scrawled message in his baby writing, which read, "Please, mamma, do come home to your Reggie soon." Mysia read and re-read this letter before she entered the sick-room, and the tears filled her eyes as she felt how different it all might have been if—if—. But there, it was useless to start brooding again; it did no good and only made her task the more difficult, now that she could not pour out all her heart's joys and sorrows to Roger as she would once have so willingly done. But there was this barrier of ice between them that made her unable to show him her letter, or even tell him about her boy. He had asked, certainly, at first, and she had answered that Reggie was well and going to school, but she volunteered no further information and avoided the subject as much as she did all others relating to her own personal affairs. Thus Roger Northbrook felt it just as difficult to break through this reserve as she did to open her heart to him while she thought her place in his heart was now filled by another, or at least that he had quite crushed his love for her out of his own.

The letter, which arrived the day before Christmas was a strengthening influence to Mysia, and she felt better able to face the struggle against her own heart after reading the missive with its message of love from her little son. She had dreaded the approach of Christmas, seeing that not a Christmas Eve had passed since that one when Roger had pleaded for her love

but she had lived in constant hope that he would return; and with that cherished hope in view had lived for him alone. Strangely enough, though she dearly loved her child, she had not a thought for the father: he might as well be dead for all she cared; indeed she almost wished herself a widow so that she might be free to marry the man she loved with all the passion her heart was capable of. She had but one longing in the years that were past, and that was to see him again. Then, as desire is prophecy, surely her very desire brought about the present state of affairs in that she was unexpectedly ushered into the presence of Roger Northbrook at a time when he was so helpless; yet she found the thing she had longed for was not what she had imagined it would be. The fruit of desire was bitter to the palate.

On this eventful Christmas Eve the hearts and minds of these two were in various stages of unrest, for both were conscious that it was the anniversary of their last parting. Luncheon was over and Mysia having seen Roger comfortably settled for the afternoon, brought her work and seated herself near the open window—for the heat was almost unbearable, just like the blast from a furnace, while the atmosphere was heavy with smoke. From where he lay Roger could see her as she sat with her head bent over a piece of embroidery, her fingers plying the needle languidly and with lack of interest. The sunlight streamed in and fell upon her crown of beautiful brown hair, tinting its strands with rays of gold. Her eyes were veiled by their white lids and long drooping lashes, and the expression of her mouth was sad and pensive. Her face was in profile from where Roger could see it, and its clear oval appealed to his artistic eye, while he found himself once again under the seductive charm of her presence, unconsciously thinking what a lovely little creature she was! How tempting of face and form, how altogether lovable!

Then, he thought, what a fool he was to allow a sentiment to stand between them; to deny himself so

much pleasure that he might have in Mysia's society during all those long tedious days spent there alone. Besides, he did love her—of course he did! He had to admit this, though he also knew that it was with the lower nature—that part of himself which he was now trying to redeem—to lift up to a higher plane! But this nature was not dead yet; it did not want to be lifted up. It wanted the deep desire of its heart gratified before the demands of the soul or Higher Self should be satisfied. Besides, he argued with himself, it was only natural, and what was natural was surely right?

Then why should he continue to crush out this sweet passion for her which was still so strong in him; so delicious even to think of? Why keep Mysia so much aloof, as he was deliberately doing, by acquiescing with this new mood of hers? Why, because he knew he was afraid to trust himself with her on any other terms. But now this barrier between them was getting unbearable as he got stronger; it was becoming intolerable and he must, yes, he *must* try another method to break it down. Thus spoke the Tempter, and he listened. Softly, and with a new and tender tone in his voice, Roger said—

“Mysia! Won't you come and talk to me? Do you forget it is Christmas Eve?”

She lifted her head, suddenly taken off her guard, and her face was suffused by a hot crimson blush that tinged even the tips of her ears. This was the first time he had addressed her by any other name than that of “Nurse” since his first exclamation when he recognised her the day she took up her duties. Her own manner had made it impossible for him to take on the old familiar tone and style of address, so that “Nurse” was all he had ever since called her. Now her surprise and very evident confusion brought a smile to his lips, for he was man enough to read what it meant to him, be he ever so modest regarding his power to win hearts or awaken the love-light in a woman's eyes. Then he

repeated his question in still more tender tones, to which Mysia at last found her voice to reply :

" I am afraid I have nothing very interesting to talk about to-day, Mr. Northbrook," she murmured.

" Then come here and sit by my side, will you—and read to me ? "

At this most reasonable request she laid aside her work and rose languidly, though her heart was fluttering with suppressed joy and inward excitement. Crossing towards a little hanging book-case on the other side of the tiny room, she said in a voice that trembled in spite of her efforts to control it :

" What shall I read to you to-day ? We finished the last book Mrs. Esbourne brought us, if you remember. There are some here which I have not looked at yet ; perhaps among them there may be something you would like. I'll look ! " She had spoken quickly to cover her agitation.

" Anything you choose will please me, Mysia," said Roger, gently.

She stood now reaching up to the little bookshelves which had been left behind with their contents when the boundary rider, Malpus Brown, had sent for his other belongings from the Hut the day after Roger's accident. For some time Mysia fumbled among a dozen or more rather shabby volumes, none of which seemed to please her, till at length she opened one and ran the pages through her fingers, when suddenly something hard fell to the floor from between the leaves. Mysia stooped and picked it up, only to reveal to her astonished gaze a photograph of herself. A sharp exclamation of surprise burst from her—

" Oh-h ! Where did this come from ? How could it get here ? "

" What is it, Mysia ? " enquired Roger, with awakened interest.

" Why, look ! A photograph ! An old photo. of myself, taken years ago. Who could have placed it there ? How did it get here ? "

" Show it to me, dear. Let me see what you

looked like years ago." And Roger held out his hand for the picture, which Mysia handed to him and then stood at the head of the bed looking down at the faded card.

It was a painted photograph of a bright-faced happy maiden of not above sixteen, in garden hat and dainty summer dress, her dog on the grass at her feet, a basket of lovely roses on her arm and the glory of summer sunshine all around her : a very Flora among the flowers and a lovely Flora, too ; fair, sweet and beautiful as the blossoms around her feet and over her golden head.

What a vast difference between that happy careless time when she was the only and idolized child of her doting father, who considered nothing too good for his lovely young daughter—that father who had, on his deathbed, given her to the man who had squandered her fortune and then deserted her before she was a mother, and left her penniless and desolate—all this flooded her mind with bitter memories and brought her back to this sad, sad present, so that the tears sprang to her eyes and she turned away to hide them, when Roger said admiringly—

"What a lovely little creature you were then, Mysia ! But," he added, with a quick upward glance at her averted face, "you are still beautiful, dear."

Mysia could not answer at the moment, and he continued :

"How did this photo. get here ? Did you bring it with you ?"

"No, no, I have never seen it since—since I was first married ; not since I left my father's home," faltered Mysia, in quivering tones.

"Then how did it get into that book ? Whose book is it ? Show it to me, Mysia," he added quickly.

She handed him the volume—a copy of Boccaccio's "Decameron," much thumb-marked—and Roger turned to the front page, where he saw written there the name "Reginald E. Vernon." It was crossed out and

partially blurred, yet not too much so for Roger to be able to distinguish it and recognise the handwriting of the man who had been his friend.

Mysia glanced over his shoulder again as he read and before he could venture another suggestion as to the identity of the owner of the book or how it came to be there, she burst into a passion of tears and sobbed hysterically. Roger dropped book and photograph upon the counterpane and, forgetting everything except the fact that the woman he had loved so long and ardently was in distress—was weeping by his side—he stretched out his arms and caught her to his breast, exclaiming in tenderest tones of deep and passionate love :

“ Mysia, my Mysia, my dear love ! Come and let me comfort you. Come to me, sweetheart, and don't weep, for I love you, I love you, and have always loved you, Mysia.”

Then Mysia found herself held close within the warm embrace of the man she loved. Found herself in the heaven she had longed for. Her head was pillowed upon Roger's breast, his arms folded closely around her while he showered passionate kisses upon lips, cheeks, hair and eyes ; kissing away the tears that would flow in spite of his whispered pleadings “ not to weep.”

But she was so exhausted by her long pent-up emotions and so worn out by her lengthy night vigils that she felt too inert to attempt to resist him had she even so desired. In fact, despite her physical disability, she was morally incapable of putting away from her again this cup of coveted joy for which she had so long thirsted—that draught of love now placed to her parched lips and drawn in by her thirsty heart. Yes, she must drink of it just once, even if she died the next hour.

So Mysia lay there upon that warm, strong, manly breast, and felt the fierce beating of his heart keep time with her own in its passion of love ; and while it lasted this was all the Edenic bliss Mysia desired.

The burning touch of this new and exquisite delight : this abandonment of love which had so suddenly come to her and flooded her whole being at a moment when she least expected it, this was heaven indeed. Oh ! it was too wonderful to realize fully, and she was utterly incapable of rejecting it, even though she knew in the strictest sense it was to her forbidden. She was too overpowered with emotion, and her woman's heart yielded gladly.

This was the food it had craved for : the living waters it had panted for during three weary, lonely years. To be loved like this by the one man whom her heart worshipped. Yes, just to love and be loved was the height of Mysia's ambition on earth, and in this auspicious hour it was gratified.

Can any human heart blame her ? Could she be accused even of folly and weakness by any but those who are only virtuous because they have not been tempted ? Love was the strongest part of Mysia's nature and it had been denied her in life so far, and now, when, though late, the boon she desired was within her reach she had not the moral courage to reject it, to thrust aside the gift proffered by the one dearest to her in all the world of men ; she had no wish to break the spell that bound them together in this close and impassioned embrace. No, no, it was hers now and she would take it, would keep it, since her years of faithful devotion surely entitled her to receive it. This was her reward. So her wild yearning for love—for *his* love—made her snatch indiscriminately at what was offered to her by Roger now ; and she never paused to question how or in what manner it was given, she only felt—she only knew—she loved him and him alone, and could love none other. Her absent husband, her professional duties—even her child—were all forgotten. While she lay in Roger's arms there was to her no earth, nor time, nor future life ; heaven and hell was a dream—a myth. She was there already, for here was her universe, and he was her god.

CHAPTER XXIV.

MOMENTOUS MOMENTS.

"We live in deeds, not years; in thought, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.

We should count time by heart throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

—P. J. BAILEY.

Roger Northbrook had experienced two moments in his life which were to him pregnant with great issues, and these had eventuated within the last two months. The preceding years had been full of active interest: they had been important in bringing him forward into the front ranks of literature, and had crowned him with success, prosperity and a certain degree of fame—dear to the hearts of all men. All this had been his; yet not one of these most desirable things had given him happiness, nor indeed true contentment: there was a something still lacking. Never until now, throughout all those years of achievement, had he ever given any serious thought to his inner development. He had never been prompted to probe his inner consciousness of what was strictly right or morally wrong, beyond the social laws of modern life, supported by the deep-rooted principles of his own strong character. In the past there had never been any occasion to wage a battle between principle and inclination, such as he was now called upon to fight. This latter experience, and all the discomforts and unrest attendant upon such a state of mind, had been reserved for him to face since his return to Australia. It was, in fact, only since his first meeting with Edna Esbourne that he had been really conscious of the workings of another and deeper Self within, whose operations had brought about a change in him.

But what was this change? He could not easily define it, since the feeling he had for Edna Esbourne was not that which men term "Love." It was more like reverence. But whatever it was it certainly made an alteration in Roger Northbrook's mode of life, and disturbed the even flow of his

past easy-going philosophy. Where once he had known only the quiet content of a self-satisfied state of existence: a condition of mind that was always sufficient unto itself—though even then his heart was not quite at ease; he now found in its place a dissatisfaction with everything that had once seemed most desirable.

Then came the accident and Mysia had appeared before him again after years of separation; years in which he had longed intensely for the moments that had now come to him thus unexpectedly and at this particular time unsought, undesired, even unwelcomed: like the ghosts of our past misdeeds arising to confront us when we least desire to be reminded that they ever existed. Now he had a knotty problem to face, one which required careful inner searching of heart and soul—both were involved in it—and he well knew that on its correct solving depended all his future happiness: his soul's destiny.

This is a problem which most men have to face during some period of their earth lives: the time when the lower nature is arrayed against the higher; the human against the divine. And perhaps, like our friend Roger, it may come in a moment when they least expect it, in a moment of human weakness when they are least able to combat its onslaught; and it may perchance take the form of a sensuous temptation which at the time is apt to be almost, if not wholly, irresistible. This is because the desires of the flesh, instead of the promptings of the spirit in man, have been so long accustomed to have rule over him, to demand gratification at any cost; therefore the power to resist is weakened, the moral muscles become slackened, so they too fall before this foe to their peace, purity and happiness; and yielding to the lower, once more deny the claims of the higher—or, in other words, crucify in themselves the saviour who would redeem them from this enemy of their soul.

Roger Northbrook had lately become conscious that his being was capable of a greater, a higher, a

fuller Love, than this passion he felt for the woman who now lay sobbing quietly upon his breast, whose palpitating form he still held closely clasped to him. Yet during those first ecstatic moments he never paused to think of anything beyond the delight it afforded him to hold her there close to his heart, to touch her lips with his own and drink in her fragrant breath in those long clinging caresses, and thus partly satisfy the cravings in his human nature by this sweet contact. This—all this was to him pleasure of a kind, but it did not long satisfy, for once he had again tasted of the delight his heart had long craved for, he was conscious of its inability to fill the deeper demands of his being. There was a want even yet: something he could not himself define.

Why was it that he was able to thus dissect his own feelings? Why, when only a few months ago he had returned to Sydney a restless discontented man, knowing no peace of mind or heart, because he longed only for this one woman, who, through the intervention of the marriage laws, was forbidden him. Was it that very fact alone that had made her the more desirable? Or was it that Mysia herself had changed—had lost the power to charm him as she once did? No, rather was it not he himself that had changed? He had grown into a new and higher state of consciousness which consequently awakened in his soul a more elevated ideal—an ideal that must express itself in his outward life as purity, truth and righteousness of thought as well as action. He had tasted of a new and higher life—richer, fuller, purer—the life of the soul. A life that must, that *will* come to all men and women at some stage of their evolution: will come when they have developed sufficiently through experience to receive it and by living it taste of its holier joys, of which earthly or physical pleasures are but the shadows.

This new condition had brought with it, to Roger Northbrook, greater responsibilities. It made demands upon his will-power which he had never felt it incumbent upon him to recognise as operative in this

respect before ; indeed, he did not even know that this higher nature within him could so command obedience while at the same time leaving him the power to choose whether or not he should obey. But once having heard and listened to its voice within his soul, he had seen the better way and with a character like his, there was no alternative—he must follow it, even to the crushing out of all that the mortal self holds dear. He had tasted once—that holy night in the moonlit garden, when he knelt at the feet of his soul's true mate—that intoxicating draught of the true wine of life ; had experienced a great and wondrous joy—nay, more, an ecstasy which overflowed from the very depths of his awakened soul and baptized his whole being in its purifying waters, cleansing him in its tide for ever from the carnal lusts of the flesh : they would never have power over him again. Never more would he be satisfied with less than that exhilarating flood of holy love, pure and undefiled by one thought, one breath that was not worthy of the highest and best of his Divine Self—the Love of his Soul !

Thus Roger was the first to awaken from the moral lethargy that had enveloped himself and Mysia and held them as in a silken net. True, he had drank his fill off those sweet lips first, and so far his heart's cravings were satisfied before he had begun to reason. Then it was, and only then, he began to realize what that moment of weakness, of pity and sympathy for a pretty woman in tears had done for them both. How it had caused him to prove a traitor to his better self, had violated his ordinary code of honor, and torn down all the supposedly strong barriers of moral principle and rectitude which he had reared in the past as guards against his own human weakness and a woman's virtue. Yes, had scattered them all in a moment like withered leaves before a strong wind and left him conscious of a bareness, like trees in winter stripped of their foliage : a state of mind quiet foreign to this man, whose honor and moral character had been unimpeachable even to himself until this hour. His

sense of what was due to himself as a man ; and his moral convictions regarding what constitute integrity of purpose as well as of action, were violated. He was humbled, yea, abased in his own sight and felt the sting of a keen remorse whip him as with a lash. Then with that quick reaction which comes upon all great souls after a season of strong temptation, under which they have partially or even wholly succumbed ; Roger went to the other extreme and took a more severe view of his actions than was justifiable, under the circumstances. At length he broke the eloquent silence that had so long reigned between them and relaxing his grasp upon Mysia's lithe form, he gently lifted her face from its shelter upon his breast, saying softly, persuasively—

“ Mysia ! Look up, dear ! Lift your head and let me see if all your tears are gone ! I hope that you will never have cause to weep again ! ”

She raised her tear-stained face in obedience to his touch, but her downcast eyes could not meet his questioning gaze. They drooped their heavy lids with a half-shy, partially ashamed expression, while she had no words to voice what was in her heart at that moment ; she was overwhelmed with emotions that warred within her.

Presently Roger said quietly as he reached up his hand and pushed back the beautiful brown hair that had fallen over her heated brow, touching it caressingly with white, soft fingers—

“ Mysia ! ”—then he paused, and his voice faltered, for there was in its tones a deep sympathetic tremor that told of the sincere regret that filled his heart now. Mysia looked up into his face as he uttered her name, quite expecting him to elicit the confession of her love for him which was then trembling on her lips and overflowing her whole being. She was seated on the side of his bed now, still silent and drooping, and as he continued his unfinished remark, he took both her limp hands in his own and held them closely

clasped while he kept his eyes fixed upon her flushed and saddened countenance.

"Mysia! What can I say? How can I attempt to excuse myself to you? I know I have been a coward and a weakling to take advantage of your grief thus! Will you believe me, dear, it was but a moment of fierce temptation, and I yielded to an impulse I could not resist." No reply came from the girl by his side, and Roger continued, still more contritely—

"It is over now, dear little girl. I am my own sane self again, and hear me honestly, faithfully promise you that I will never again so forget myself—your position as a wife—your honor. Mysia! forgive me——, I ——."

"Hush! Oh! hush! Don't, Roger, please don't say any more," interjected Mysia in a voice of piteous appeal, while she snatched her hands from his grasp and covered her burning face with them.

He was astonished at her words and action and for a minute or more was silent, fearing that she was refusing him her forgiveness, but he was determined to plead his cause and assure her of his sincerity. He tried to withdraw her hands from her face, but she would not remove them. Then, speaking calmly, steadily—for all passion was now vanquished and reason and will alone ruled supreme—he said:

"I must, dear Mysia! I must let you know that it was pity for you that prompted me to forget that which I went away three years ago to overcome—the memory of you, after I knew you were the wife of another, and that other a man whom I once had called friend. I could not be a traitor to him, to you, and to myself. Mysia, you understand? Now say that I am forgiven!" he pleaded.

No answer came from the woman before him, and for a few seconds silence reigned in the room. Roger did not know what tortures Mysia was suffering, now that she realized he was snatching back again the gift of love she thought was hers. He was scattering

all her cherished dreams to the winds of a dark despair, by voicing these bitter regrets for his recent avowals during that tempest of passion, and thereby redeeming his words. Mysia knew his character well enough to be convinced that if he had arrived at this stage of feeling towards her and could so humble himself as to plead for forgiveness for any thought but those which friendship alone permitted, then she knew that he was lost to her for ever. Yes, she had already lost him and she realized but too well for her peace that it was a loss that nothing on earth could replace. Then a fierce rebellion arose in her heart. Every word he had uttered stung her to the quick ; whipped her with a hundred stripes and seared her very brain. She could not help this fury seizing her any more than he could a while ago control his outburst of passion. It was more than her human nature could rise superior to. For a few moments she felt desperate ; felt as though she must scream aloud ! Her tortured, wounded heart ached at this new loss ; rebelled so strongly that it was only with a supreme effort Mysia controlled herself sufficiently to choke down a fresh flood of tears : but the effort almost suffocated her. Roger, distressed over her long silence, had raised himself in the bed and managed to draw her hands away from her face and was staring into her bright tear-washed eyes, whose heavy lids strove to hide the new grief and heart-bitterness. Then he exclaimed, with a quick change of tone and expression—

“ Oh ! Mysia, you are not angry ! You *do* understand the cause of my weakness—your own beauty—you are generous. You do, I think you do forgive me ! ” while he caught her hands in his and continued more gravely : “ Tell me that we are friends again ; always good friends, dear little girl ? Now listen to me, Mysia, while I give you my promise. Hear me vow that I will never again offend you as I have done to-day. Never again shall I speak of my dishonoring love while I live, and you are a wife. Only shall I be your true and loyal friend—more even, a

brother such as I should be to the wife of the man I once called my friend—a brother Mason, therefore am I bound to protect you even from myself. You did not know this, dear, but I will tell you of how and where I knew your husband years before you met him. Now, I want but to give you my assurance of good friendship and respect, pure and true, honorable as man's should ever be to woman! Yes, Mysia, as my friend and sister I will ever regard you, and shall ever hold you dear as such until death!"

This last sentence was spoken most solemnly while he lifted her hands to his lips and kissed softly, reverently, the tips of her fingers as they lay in his palms, adding, "And thus do I seal our compact, Mysia, and pledge myself your life-long friend."

Then an uncontrollable fury took possession of Mysia Grayson. For a moment, only one, she felt she must strike him; but restraining the mad impulse, she snatched her hands from his grasp and with quick indrawn breath sprang to her feet, white as marble and rigid as a statue before him. Then she forgot everything—forgot who she was; her calling; his helplessness; their position to each other; all—all that she had been so careful to remember under ordinary conditions, for the floodgates of her fury were loosed just as were those torrents of tears an hour ago. *Her* reaction had come now, but it took quite a different form to that of Roger's, for her nature was so dissimilar, and the very unexpectedness of it made it the more impressive. It but brought to the front the strange inconsistencies of human nature and with such vivid force that it gave Roger Northbrook a severe shock. It made him question within himself if we really ever know our friends, our nearest and dearest; or indeed if in truth we ever really know ourselves?

During those few moments there was silence in the room: a stillness that could be felt and which was most oppressive, like that which precedes a tempest. Mysia stood with her little head thrown back, her hands tightly clenched as she gave vent to the long pent-up

passion of love for this man—a love which now seemed turned to gall and wormwood, and was overflowing her very soul with its waters of bitterness, till like the Israelites of old she could have cried aloud, “*Marah! Marah!*” The next instant a torrent of words burst forth from her white and trembling lips, and fell upon the ears of the prostrate man before her like stinging hailstones, till every fibre of his body quivered and every nerve tightened involuntarily as though shrinking from their ruthless blows.

“Oh! yes, it is easy for you to ask me to forgive you, Roger Northbrook, now when there is nothing more for you to lose or win! You, who four years ago first taught me what love for a man meant and when, because of a cruel position, I was unable to accept what you offered and put you out of my life, then—then you again sought me—discovered the secret of my little son’s existence—and even then pressed me to give myself to you. Then you did not ask or care what I was, you wanted me for your own; not because you knew I loved you—you did not know that then; till—till to-day, and now I am not in a position to say you are wrong. But you pushed your advantage to the uttermost of my endurance and I—I nearly yielded. How easily I could have deceived you then. But I was honest and wrote and told you all—told you I was Reg. Vernon’s wife — deserted wife, penniless and with his child to support. Then, then you ——”

Here she faltered and Roger was about to interpose, but Mysia held up her hand imperatively, saying, “Hush! hear me out first,” and quickly resumed her hurried outburst:

“Then in the face of that honest confession you forsook me: left me without a word! Oh! of course you did quite right, for I was the wife of another man. Who could blame you for your action? Yet your love was short-lived, surely, and you forgot the dispeace you had sown in my breast! Throughout those long years of absence, unbroken even by a word of

remembrance from you, I—I have waited, worked and watched for your return some day, hoping I might be free and that you would come and fulfil your vow. Now by some strange fate I am brought to your bedside to nurse you again, and—and you are changed. You do not love me as I have loved you. Yes, I will be honest with you now, I have always loved you and you only, and with such a passion as a woman can feel but for one man in a lifetime. The love I have for you will not be satisfied with anything less than its object; it will spurn any lower claims. The mild affection I had for Reg. Vernon when as a mere girl of seventeen I married him to please my dying father—when I was a bride and an orphan within an hour—*that* was not love. I know it now—have known it for four years. I have loved but one man and that was yourself, Roger Northbrook; and oh! the pity of it. I have given my love for my life's undoing; I have squandered the treasures of my heart on one who has played with and now spurned them. I —— ”

“ Mysia! Mysia! For God's sake, stop! Listen to me, let me speak! ” interrupted Roger beseechingly, but Mysia gave no heed to him, and with deeper sarcasm in tone and expression continued :

“ Now when you have indulged your heart's passion and let your senses enjoy to their full the burning kisses you showered upon me while the fit lasted—now you lightly tell me that you are sorry—that you will be as a friend to me always—that you will treat me as a brother should a sister! Do you think that a woman's heart is satisfied with the cold consolation of a duty when it has once known love? That it can be satisfied with but half a life? Do you think that a legal contract can bind me to a man whom I do not love? A man like Reg. Vernon, who has broken his vows to me and left me with a blighted, wasted life? Am I to be for ever sacrificed to a man's selfishness and remain a willing sacrifice when my whole being is alive—on fire—with love for another man? No, I

tell you I am bound by law to Reg. Vernon, but my heart is yours and yours only ! ”

She stopped, breathless, and almost choking with excitement and the intensity of her passionate protest ; but before Roger could respond she burst forth defiantly, with a rebellious toss of her head and movement of her hands in his direction :

“ There ! Now you know the truth, and I don’t even care ! I am no longer a sham ! Now you know it is quite useless offering me friendship and thinking that you are helping and encouraging me to do my duty to the man you call my husband ! I have no husband, though I love a man as few husbands are loved ! If Reg. Vernon were to come back to-morrow, I wouldn’t live with him as his wife. Don’t ever speak to me of duty to him ! *Duty* ”—she continued, bitterly—“ *Duty ! I hate the word !* I’ve been a slave to it all these lonely years and what has it done for me but left me a lonely unloved woman and a deserted wife. Now—now —— ”

Here her voice grew husky and she paused to recover herself, and then Roger took the opportunity to interject—

“ Mysia ! Mysia ! Stop a few minutes, let me speak—you must know that I —— ”

Again she interrupted him, and in tones still more vigorous and tensely strung with the misery that was bursting forth from the over-charged depths of her heart, Mysia would have her say out and but more effectively proved the truth of Congreve’s words : “ Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned ; nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.”

“ Nothing you can say will matter now. I know you have no love for me ! It isn’t consideration for my honor or adherence to my wifely duty you care about now, Roger Northbrook ! It is because—because you love another woman, and that woman is *Edna Esbourne !* ”

She paused to watch the effect of her words upon him and saw him wince at the sound of Edna's name spoken by her thus.

"Yes, I know I am right ; her name was the first on your lips when you recovered consciousness—was the first word you greeted *me* with : E-d-n-a !" This was spoken with a long-drawn breath and a bitterness of tone that was indescribable. It fell harshly upon Roger's ears from the lips of Mysia just then : the name of the one woman above all others whom he revered in the very depths of his soul !

"Mysia, I command you to stop !" he cried. "I will listen to no more. You are not yourself. You don't know what you are saying. You are overwrought by the strain of your nursing and this most unfortunate incident of to-day. I think you ——"

"Yes, I do know what I am saying. I know that it is Edna Esbourne whom you love, and that because she is free you are able to marry her. She is not another man's wife, forsaken, as I am. But—I will tell her that—that she has not won your first love. I——"

"I can forgive much because you have loved much ; but, Mysia, I must request you not to speak of Miss Esbourne as you have just done. You do her a great injustice ; and myself also. Were you not so hysterical you would feel that you ——," began Roger.

"Oh ! of course you will defend her ; it does not matter about me. Nothing matters to me now. I know I have cut off your friendship even, and the last thread of love has been severed between us. Happiness is gone from me for ever ! My life is joyless now, ruined and desolate. I have no one, no one to love—I ——"

Then Mysia broke down completely and sobbed brokenly : "Oh ! Roger ! Roger, I have loved you so dearly. I could not help it, I cannot cease to love you. No one will love you as I have and will—I'll love you till I die ! Oh ! how I wish I were dead." This last

sentence was uttered with a piteous wailing cry that smote Roger Northbrook to the heart.

The next moment Mysia had covered her white tearful face with her apron and rushed precipitately out of the room. It was a second or two before Roger realized that she was gone and then he called eagerly, sharply :

“ Mysia ! Mysia ! Nurse Mysia ! ”

No answer. Again and again he repeated the call louder and stronger, and in more imperative tones, but no Mysia returned. Never in his life did Roger feel such a fierce rebellion rise within him at his enforced inaction, and he would have risked anything to have been able to have gone after her, but he could not move his injured limb, encased as it then was in plaster of paris. At length Greta came in answer to his repeated calls and he asked her to send nurse to him. The girl returned to inform him that she could not find Nurse Mysia ; and he at once concluded she had gone into the bush near, and commanded the girl to hasten after her and bid her return, for he wanted her.

Greta departed to do his bidding, leaving Roger alone, a prey to his own thoughts, and suffering intensely from the great mental strain through which he had just passed. He was thoroughly unnerved by the shock which Mysia's change of attitude towards him had occasioned ; and he would have been very justly incensed had he not felt confident that it was but the result of the long strain she had imposed upon herself by nursing him as she had done without any assistance. Those long night vigils by his bed-side during the first weeks of his accident had meant great loss of sleep to her ; so that the tension had tended to unhinge her nerves. She was not her calm rational self ; otherwise he could never have believed it possible that his once gentle Mysia could have given vent to such an unseemly and vindictive outburst. But, alas ! it was born of jealousy, and that green-eyed monster

would goad the sweetest nature to do and say things they would otherwise scorn.

"Yes, truly," mused Roger Northbrook, as he sank back among his pillows and pushed the hair off his heated brow with a weariness of look and action that betokened the extreme exhaustion he was feeling, now that the strain was over. "Yes, truly, the heart of a man or a woman when swayed by the passion we call love is a most complex thing, and one that requires more than the human mind with its finite wisdom to fathom its strange mysteries!"

An extreme lassitude was stealing over him, due to the recent excitement he had gone through and the excessive heat of the day. A blissful unconsciousness took possession of him, and with his last coherent thoughts he found himself longing intensely for the presence of Edna Esbourne to soothe and calm his tempest-tossed mind with her gentle words of Love and Peace.

Where, though, was Nurse Mysia? Why did she not return to her duties? Surely no excuse could justify her in neglecting the small things of her daily life just because a crisis had come upon her thus suddenly: a crisis which she evidently had not the moral courage or strength of mind to face calmly and dispassionately at the moment when she was put to the test. Mysia had evidently proved herself better able to bear the big trials and troubles of her unfortunate circumstances than the unsatisfied desire of an unrequited love. She rebelled with the whole force of her being against this condition into which she had been forced by what she considered a cruel fate; while her wounded heart rose in angry protest against this latter deprivation of its supposed rights to love and be loved. Reason tottered on her throne, and wild impulse, unfettered and untrained, usurped her place; while under its rule a revolution governance set in, and resulted in a state of internal discord and consequent chaos in the kingdom of her heart and mind.

As a child she had not been trained to practice self-repression ; had not been taught to know that we are not brought into the world simply to be petted, pampered and cared for by others ; but that our truest happiness is only found in service for humanity. Our mission here is primarily to develop our own soul, and in such development we help others to unfold theirs also.

Mysia Grayson had, however, never been led to think upon such subjects. As a girl her moral and spiritual instruction had been of the frailest and most superficial character, imparted, too, by the gentlest and most indulgent of fathers. Then when death deprived her of his love and cherishment, her experiences with her husband were not such as would develop the strongest attributes of womanhood in the young wife, who was then treated more like a spoiled child ; therefore, it was not until she was left so ruthlessly to face the world alone that she realized how badly equipped was she for the stern battle of life. Experience now was her teacher, and though a stern one, her lessons were salutary. But this harsh teacher had not been well received by Mysia Grayson, for she resented bitterly all the hard and unpleasant lessons that were imposed upon her ; she chafed beneath the chastening rod, only obeying the behests when it was impossible to do otherwise. She refused to take the lessons to heart which would have moulded her life into more perfect form, transposed its inharmonies into a higher key, till from those jarring discords would have evolved the symphony divine—a symphony in which every soul is a note in the harmony that makes the Music of the Spheres.

During those latter years of her life when she had had to fight and win her daily bread for herself and her little son, Mysia had not been grateful for any of the good gifts that were hers, feeling as she did that she was entitled to much more than Fate had given her. Her success in her profession was not because she loved her work, which she regarded as a means to an end,

What she most longed for was a return to her former worldly position of ease and opulence such as she enjoyed in her father's home, and during the early months of her married life, till her husband's prodigality squandered her fortune, when he deserted her, leaving her penniless to go out into the world and earn her own daily bread—she who had never soiled her hands by toil before. So she rebelled at the new conditions and did not attempt to reconcile herself to her lost luxuries. So far her experiences had all been upon the material plane; the wants, impulses and longings of the natural woman were paramount; they formed her chiefest good and when lacking, life, for her, lost its best joys. Then she greatly desired the delights of love. The rapture of loving and being loved ardently, wholly, by one particular person above all others. Yes, to be loved! to be loved! This was the one cry, the secret longing of Mysia's heart; and the repression was harder to bear than anything else in her life; so that all these surging passions, these intense yearnings which disturbed her inmost peace, could be summed up in the one word "discontent."

When Mysia rushed out of Roger's presence in that state of deep mental distress, she was conscious of but one desire: it was to get as far away from him as possible; never to hear his voice again; never to see his reproachful face. She felt she could not endure to behold the change of manner and expression which he must inevitably evince towards her after her wild outburst. She knew instinctively that she had now lost all charm for him; all power to hold him to her against all others, more especially against that calm, dignified and self-contained woman—Edna Esbourne. She had shown him quite another side of her character: had revealed a lesser nature hidden beneath the one he had first known and loved in her: that sweet, trusting, womanly nature, that was originally so much a part of her, and which first won Roger's heart.

Oh! how she suffered! How her whole being throbbed and smarted with pain during that wild

impulsive run from the hut! Away, away into the bush—away anywhere, only to get out of his sight. She never paused to think of the folly of her action; but with half-smothered sobs and streaming eyes she ran on, on, on, with flying feet to which anger, jealousy and despair lent wings. What did she now care for her professional reputation? What did it matter what anyone thought of her now that he was no longer for her, now that he had ceased to love her. Life or death, pleasure or pain, success or failure, love or hate were all the same to her tortured spirit. So she fled on across the paddocks, away into the scrub, intent only upon seeking a hiding place somewhere in its deep recesses, somewhere—anywhere—so that no one might discover her and detect her misery and humiliation; some place where she might find oblivion from the torment that was racking her heart and brain and driving her to this state of frenzy!

Twilight had deepened and the night shadows were settling down upon the silent bush. There was a dense haze hanging over everything and a suffocating heat in the atmosphere that was almost stifling; yet Mysia heeded nothing, not even the sound of the scurrying rabbits and wallabies that scuttled away at her speeding footsteps. It was not till she had penetrated deep into the dense scrub of "Forest Glade" that she chanced to stumble over the boughs and broken branches of a fallen tree—the very one that had caused Roger Northbrook's accident—and twisted her ankle so badly that she was forced to halt. Then moaning with this new pain, she managed to scramble out of the network of twigs and shattered timber that bestrewed the ground all around where she found herself, and with crushed spirits, bruised body and aching heart, crawled to a clear spot under a big gum tree and there throwing herself prone upon the ground, gave way to a torrent of bitter tears—tears of self-pity as much as of anger and of pain.

So she lay sobbing unrestrainedly, and gradually darkness settled down upon the scene; but it was a

darkness that was illumined by a peculiar glow on the western horizon which was not altogether due to the last rays of the setting sun, for this had long since sunk below the rim of the distant plains, like a great crimson ball of molten fire. No ! this was a light that was strange and ominous to the experienced eye of a bushman, for it heralded the approach of the dreaded Fire Fiend !

But Mysia was oblivious of all around her. Generous Mother Nature had taken this rebellious child of hers into her bosom, and in sweet forgetfulness of all her troubles poor Mysia slept.

CHAPTER XXV.

A TERRIBLE NIGHT DRIVE.

“ Life is re-produced by sacrifice. The life that is lost is the only life that is saved. The dead self is the only life-bearer. Only the man who thus sinks himself in his cause is remembered as its apostle.”

—FRANCIS G. PEABODY.

In the country districts of New South Wales bush fires were raging. Every day reports were to hand of the appearance of a fresh outbreak. At this particular time nearly the whole of the Riverina district was ablaze, there was consequently widespread devastation and serious losses of grass, crops and stock ; while scores of small settlers and farmers lost all they possessed ; even after fierce fights with the flames in their efforts to wrench their holdings from its clutches, they were compelled to fly for their lives and leave all they had gathered by the toil of years to that relentless demon which devoured all and left them but a charred and blackened waste as a reward for past industry. Such were in many cases hopelessly ruined, and had to be dependent upon the bounty of the public by subscriptions, and to look to the Government for aid to enable them to make a fresh start.

Even the big holders of pastoral leases who could count their sheep and cattle by thousands, found that the Fire Fiend was no respecter of persons nor

possessions. These too conned the reports in the daily papers as anxiously as did the man whose all consisted of a few acres of farm land. On this occasion there were outbreaks reported from all parts of the country, extending from Lismore in the north to Delegate in the south, while among the thickly wooded ranges vast forests of flame raged with unabated fury for days at a stretch, stripping the glades and fern-clad gullies of every vestige of vegetation, and leaving all bare and unsightly where once they were clothed in sylvan verdure. Then as the wind changed from its quarters, these masses of rolling, writhing flames swept down the hillsides into the valleys and plains below, licking up everything in their pathway, and leaving only black ruin in their track. Large areas were affected; stations, settlements and farms, and sometimes whole townships were alike burnt out, the inhabitants barely escaping with their lives. Many thrilling tales of adventures and narrow escapes were reported in the newspapers. In some instances men were overtaken by the flames and, despite fire-breaks, were suffocated by the dense smoke from green timber, and fell in the lonely burning bush to rise no more: only their charred remains being recovered when the fires had passed over. Others had sought safety in gullies, dams, creeks, or waterholes, as the case might be, where wallabies, rabbits, sheep, snakes and other bush animals alike seeking shelter, had already found refuge in their hour of danger and distress, their dire extremity tending to quell all natural instincts of antagonism against hereditary foes. This was a time when all classes were levelled: all feuds forgotten; and so these companions in trouble, men, women and children, with farm and domestic animals, were huddled together in a miscellaneous heap, seeking safety in the little water there was left after the long drought, though even that, in some instances, was almost at boiling point, and yet they were glad to avail themselves of this means of safety in one element to escape another and more deadly foe. All were

now one in distress as they were one in the first law of Nature—Self-preservation—that makes the whole world akin.

During breakfast on that memorable 24th of December, when Mr. Esbourne opened the papers to ascertain the progress of the fires and the location of the latest outbreak, his eye caught the announcement in large type at the head of a double column, which read: "BIG BLAZE AT BATHURST, Pastoral Properties Devastated." He then read aloud to all at the table a thrilling account of the enormous amount of damage done by the fires in that district. It appeared they had been raging there for over a week, entirely destroying all grass and fencing for many miles around and leaving the once flourishing country a charred and blackened waste. The whole horizon had been brilliantly illuminated by the fires on the hills and the country all round the district was ablaze.

This was certainly some considerable distance from Wagga, yet it increased the nervous dread of what might happen should a similar outbreak come closer home to them at "Cumbooquepa," as appeared very probable from the disturbing reports concerning a big blaze at Albury, together with bush fires of smaller dimensions at Tumut and Gundagai. This latter news occasioned most real alarm to Mr. Esbourne, since up in the hills towards Tumberumba and Adelong it was reported that a majestic roll of writhing flame, some forty miles across its front and about eighty feet in height, was raging furiously and sweeping across the country. Should there be the slightest change of wind its course would be turned into the valley and on to the tablelands, where numerous small holdings would lie directly in its track. Then from the very latest bulletin it appeared another conflagration had developed out west again of the first mentioned fire and had already got a good hold on portions of Bre-warrina Station, about 20 miles from Narrandera. This was sweeping the whole vast estate and running into Warringoberimby; and though it had been checked

there, another fire started on the north side of the river, devouring all it could come across on "Grong-Grong" and "Berenbed."

These latter reports were very bad news indeed, more especially as the wind had changed, as was anticipated when the report was published. Unless it veered round again or the long-looked-for rains descended, there was everything to dread from the coming fires. It was recognised by all that nothing but a miracle could now ensure their entire escape from the threatened disaster, taking into consideration the force and speed with which it was travelling in their direction. As it was, their position was dangerous in the extreme, seeing they were now literally surrounded on all sides by fires—standing in a centre, as it were, where it would be impossible to even hope that they should altogether escape while others went down before the oncoming foe. Temora, Narrandera, Cootamundra, Gundagai, Adelong, and Albury—all were more or less already in the clutch of the fiend, so that now it was merely a matter of days—perhaps hours—before it would also embrace their extensive holdings in its blighting grasp, and once again leave its dark trail upon the rich pasture lands of "Cumbooquepa" Station.

"My dear," said the squatter, turning to his wife, and rising as he spoke, "things are certainly getting serious for us. I'm very much afraid we're in for it again this year."

"Oh! George, I hope not," returned Mrs. Esbourne, anxiously.

"So do I, most sincerely, but hope has to be backed up by reason and action to prevent the disaster if we can," replied her husband. "So come along, Frank, and help Hanson and myself to get the stock mustered and things made snug. The men must be set to work to cut fresh fire-breaks."

"Nice way to spend Christmas Eve—eh, Cyril?" remarked Frank, with a grimace, as he rose from the

table. "Different from our last Christmas in England."

"Yes, that was a white one, sure enough," answered Cyril.

"And this has every appearance of being a red one, I'm thinking," interposed Mr. Esbourne.

"And with a very black ending, too," added Frank. "By jove! mother, it takes the zest out of that Christmas fare you've been preparing, eh? You won't need to roast your geese and turkeys to-morrow—they'll be all ready cooked for you," he said, laughing.

"What! Surely it's not so bad as that, Frank?" ejaculated Cyril.

"Yes, indeed, sometimes it actually is," asserted the squatter. "You'll most likely have a chance of seeing oxen, sheep and pigs roasted before your eyes, with horns, hides and hoofs on; and geese, turkeys and fowls baked without the trouble of plucking them."

"Oh! Father," exclaimed Gracie from her couch in the corner of the lounge, "how can you say such things? You'll make Cyril think this is a barbarous country we live in!"

"Well, my dear little girl, I'm sorry to say that these things do occur occasionally, as both your mother and I know to our cost. You are the helpless invalid as we see you to-day because of the horrors of the last bush fire we went through, when we lost everything, homestead and all, only escaping with our lives."

"God grant we never experience the like of it again!" said Mrs. Esbourne fervently, and several in the room echoed her prayer.

It was shortly after four o'clock that same day when fresh news of the approaching fires reached "Cumbooquepa." Edna was in the orchard gathering some fruit with which she meant to ride over to Honeysuckle Hut later in the day, and see Nurse Mysia and perhaps Roger, who was well enough to see visitors now. As Edna passed through the

gate leading out of the orchard with her laden basket on her arm, she was met by Peter the groom, who, coming forward, relieved her of the burden, remarking :

"Have you heard, Miss, that the fire's coming this way as fast as a horse can travel? The master's given us all our orders to get ready to fight it."

"No!" ejaculated Edna, pausing in her walk. "When did this news come in? The fire near us since morning? Surely not! Do you know in what direction it is travelling, Peter?"

"Yes, miss, it be coming from Lockhart towards the river on the north. They say several of the big stations have been burnt out and dreadful reports have come from Tumut and Adelong. Every one is sure we're in for it round here this time. Some thinks as 'ow the river'll stop it. But the master's very doubtful if it will 'isself. Bill Stokes has just come in and says he had a close shave, for it's travelling at a great rate."

Edna did not wait for anything more, but hastened towards the house, where she found her worst fears confirmed. Then she immediately sought her father. She found him busy in the wool-shed, directing his men and working with a will himself as vigorously as they, getting the big bales of golden fleece into places of safety and covering well with tarpaulins, in case they were attacked by this oncoming foe to progress and prosperity—a foe that would strip them of what meant many thousands of pounds to the squatter, besides the loss he might also sustain to his flocks, and on which depended the income for next year and many years to follow.

Not waiting to make her voice heard above the din, Edna rushed up the centre of the big shed to where he stood amid piled-up bales of wool, and catching him by the arm in her excitement, said :

"Father, is it true that the fire is coming on us from two different points? The men say so!"

"Yes, it is. That's why we're taking these precautions, my dear," replied the squatter, turning away to direct one of his men near by.

"Father, have you given any orders about the removal of Mr. Northbrook with the nurse from Honeysuckle Hut?" asked Edna.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed the squatter in dismay, "In my bustle over this latest report I forgot there may be danger down that way. What shall we do about getting him removed? Len. is away and Frank gone to help in the mustering. I've no one I can trust to send for them."

"Father, trust me, I can go myself," volunteered Edna eagerly.

"You! Why, what could you do to move a helpless man whom the doctors will not even let us interfere with under ordinary conditions?" exclaimed her father.

"Leave the ways and means to me, father," rejoined Edna calmly, "these are extraordinary conditions, you'll admit. I only want your consent to take Peter and the "overlander" and I'll manage the rest with the assistance of Sallust and Nurse Mysia."

"Well, my girl, I'm too busy and worried to make any objection; you'll do what's best, I know. Go, and good luck to you, Edna!" and he turned away hastily to answer his overseer, who was speaking to him from the other side of the shed. Edna did not wait for anything further, but the next minute was speeding across the paddock to the house to make preparations for her journey to Honeysuckle Hut.

When Edna was on the verandah pulling on her thick driving gloves preparatory to starting, Cyril Clifford came out of the house ready dressed also, and volunteered his services, but Edna thanked him warmly and declined his unselfish offer. She well knew the scope of the young clergyman's abilities in a case like the present one; and although she was sure his spirit was most willing to face the strain, his physical powers were scarcely of a character to stand what might lie before them during that night-drive and the risky undertaking of a race with a bush fire.

"It is so good of you, Cyril," said Edna, noticing

how disappointed he seemed at her refusal of his services, "but really, I shall have quite a load to bring back with me, and even one more counts under these conditions, you know. But, Cyril," she added, lowering her voice, "there is something else you can do for me if you will."

"What is that, Miss Esbourne?" he asked eagerly, his boyish face lighting up with pleasure. "Only name it and you know if it is in my power to do it, I am both ready and willing."

"Well, I want you to promise me that if there is any real danger you will take care of Gracie. You will make her your particular care? Len is in Sydney and there is no one but myself that I would feel she is safe with except father, and he may be too busy; but if I knew you were keeping careful guard over her I should be quite relieved."

"I can promise you that, Miss Esbourne, without hesitation," the young man answered, with quiet gravity.

"Thank you, Cyril. Now I must go and say good-bye to her and tell her she is in your charge." Hurrying into the lounge, Edna said:

"Gracie, I am going now to bring Mr. Northbrook and Nurse Mysia up to the house. I have left you in Cyril's charge, and he has promised to look after you till I return. You will be quite safe, dear, I know." Then speaking more fervently as she stooped over the child, Edna added, "Perhaps, Gracie, our prayers may be answered and the healing we look for may come to you in the same way as you lost your strength. 'Man's extremity is God's opportunity,' you know. In any case be brave, my pet, trust in the Omnipresent Father, for He can save and preserve you and give you strength. You will be able to walk when you *believe* you really can. Don't forget to send me strong thoughts, too, darling. Good-bye!"

A few minutes later, with a parting "God bless you!" from Grace and Cyril, Edna was in her seat beside Peter, and, gathering up the reins, drove off in

the direction of the Hut, sending her fine pair of horses forward at a smart pace. The tracks were rough and dusty, and the deep ruts and holes made by the passage of thousands of sheep and cattle and timber carts passing over them, made the vehicle jolt terribly, while great clouds of dust rose behind them, filling mouth, eyes and nostrils with its suffocating particles. Then, too, the oppressive heat was almost unbearable, for the wind blew the hot air from the burning country across the plains in their faces, charged as it was with the sickening odor of burning green wood, accompanied with smoke and haze that quite obliterated the landscape, blotting it out as effectually as a dense fog.

So far as they were able to discern from their position on the plain, there were no distinct signs of the near presence of the fire, nor had it apparently yet crossed the Kimo Ranges from the Gundagai direction. Still it was impossible to tell when and where it might break out, since they were surrounded now on three sides and the density of the atmosphere convinced Edna that the main body of the fire was not far distant from them. Indeed this supposition was borne out by some signs that were well known to the eye of the bushwoman, for myriads of birds were flying past them in flocks, all kinds and species mixed together in their terror as they winged their flight to safer districts, chased from their usual haunts by their relentless enemy, the bush fire, which thins the numbers of the Australian feathered tribes more effectually than anything else, even driving them far out to sea in their wild terror and search for safety. In some instances an incoming vessel has been literally besieged by these unfortunate fugitives till masts and shrouds were outlined with cockatoos, parrots, wild pigeons, and paraqueets, all seeking rest after their long sustained flight from death and danger. As these came shrieking overhead in frightened confusion Edna had a pretty good idea how close the fire was to them on the other side of the range. Just at that moment as she was speaking to Peter, something struck her on

the shoulder and fell at her feet. It was a white cockatoo, one of that year's fledglings evidently, exhausted by the heat. Edna stooped and picked it up where it lay fluttering helplessly, quite unable to rise, with its mouth open gasping and panting for breath, in its evident distress for want of water. Though generally so vicious, as Edna held it in her hand, its pretty yellow plumed head drooped limply and its eyes closed. Then Edna bade Peter pour a few drops of water from the water bag down the exhausted bird's throat. This he did and it immediately revived. She opened the lid of the basket that was always strapped to the front of the splash-board, and slipped the bird into it, remarking "that if it lived, she would take it home to Gracie" who had a peculiar love for these wild birds and had an aviary full of them in the lounge.

It was quite dusk before they reached Honeysuckle Hut and Edna was surprised to find the place in total darkness. With some trepidation she hurried across the space between the slip rails to the door, which stood wide open, and crossing the threshold called softly :

"Nurse Mysia ? Are you there, nurse ? "

No answer was returned to her call and the silence and darkness which enveloped the hut made Edna wonder for a second if it could be possible that anyone else had come and removed Mr. Northbrook and the nurse before she arrived. This supposition, however, seemed quite impracticable within the time that had elapsed since the news reached the homestead about the proximity of the fires to "Cumbooquepa" Station. Again Edna called and ran through to the outer skillion to see if Greta was there. Still no response. The place was apparently deserted, for there was not even a sound from the direction of the sick-room. It was scarcely possible that Mr. Northbrook could be asleep after the noise of their arrival. Then without waiting, Edna re-entered the hut and pushing open the half-closed door of the bedroom said as she peered into the gloom :

“Are you awake, Mr. Northbrook? May I come in?”

Once more she was greeted by blank silence, which this time so alarmed her that without further ceremony she entered the room and stood near the bedside, peering down at the form she just distinguished lying there so motionless. Not even the sound of his breathing reached her strained and anxious ears. Then she passed her hands over his face, only to find it was cold and clammy. With a quick instinctive movement she drew down the bedclothes and laid her trembling hand upon his heart, but in her feverish anxiety and excitement she could detect no pulsation. To all outward appearance Roger Northbrook was dead.

Then for one—only one—awful minute, Edna seemed to lose her nerve and her trust. Her heart gave one great bound into her throat so that she was almost suffocated, while every nerve and muscle trembled with an awful fear. Oh! what did it mean? Had he died suddenly and the nurse perhaps in terror fled with Greta to procure help? Could he—could he indeed be dead?

Then from her white and trembling lips a swiftly breathed prayer fell on the silence of the room—

“Oh! God, my God! No! no, no! It cannot be! He is not dead, for Thou art his Life. Life is immortal! Life, Thy Life can know no death, cannot die! Roger, you must live, LIVE!”

It took but a few moments for these sensations to pass through the mind and heart of Edna Esbourne. Then by a supreme effort she steadied her unstrung nerves and once again applied herself to discover any signs of life in the quiet form beside her, but failing, she determined to seek assistance from Peter, and first of all to procure a light. In the outer room she called Peter and informed him of the state of things, bidding him bring a lamp. Together they entered the room again and by careful examination Edna discovered that Roger had relapsed into a state of unconsciousness

somewhat similar to that which had overcome him at the beginning of his illness. The relief was great to Edna and she felt that she could now manage things herself. But all efforts on her part to rouse him failed, while her own agitated state of mind and the presence of the groom made it impossible for her to attempt to try her thought power upon him: she at this moment distrusted herself.

Edna then determined to make preparations for removing him as he was hoping he might come round later. Now there was no time for delay, since danger to his life lay in every moment spent at the hut. Leaving the room with Peter, Edna went outside, remarking in a tone of real distress:

"I cannot understand this desertion of her patient by Nurse Mysia. It is unaccountable. Where can they all be?"

"Perhaps they both got frightened and have cleared out for the homestead?" suggested Peter.

"What! Leave Mr. Northbrook alone, or attempt a walk of ten miles on a dark and moonless night? Impossible!" replied Edna. "No, no, Peter, there is something else wrong I am sure. Besides, where is Sallust—he ought to be back here long since."

Then she "cooed" long, loud and shrilly in her clear voice. At length there was an answer from a distance and Peter recognised it as Sallust coming from the direction of the homestead by a back track through the scrub. Edna bid Peter go and hurry him on to their aid, while she returned to the hut and made hasty preparations for the removal of the unconscious Roger. She did pause once to make another vain attempt to call back the dormant faculties of the brain, but her straying thoughts made her quite unable to concentrate her mind upon the One Source of supply for all her needs; and although she found her lips framing the words "Life! Strength! Health! Intelligence!" it was but in a half-hearted mechanical way and one which she well knew would not bring about the desired result; would not invoke that Infinite Life

which alone could instantly restore the suspended vitality of the sick man before her. Her powers were too scattered, for her ears were listening anxiously for the sound of voices outside, and her mind was too outwardly active to enable her to then secure the inward peace she sought. She was trying to do things herself and the Spirit was put in the background.

Presently the sound of horses' hoofs and the chatter of Greta's German tongue made Edna hasten to the door, where she beheld Sallust leading his horse by the bridle and Greta, walking by his side, was talking in animated tones, while Peter strode before them listening to what she was saying. Edna beckoned to them to hasten. Reaching the hut, explanations were exchanged and from the broken and disconnected sentences told in flurried excited accents by the girl, whose broken English and dull slow delivery made it difficult for Edna to grasp the most important points, she managed to gather from the girl that something rather tragic had happened. Greta had heard Nurse Mysia talking for a long, long time to Mr. Northbrook—nearly all the afternoon—she seemed to be angry, and then all at once she ran out with her apron covering her face, and Greta heard her crying. She never spoke a word, but went out of the front door and across the paddock into the bush. Then, Mr. Northbrook had called the nurse several times, and when Greta told him she had gone out he bade her quite sharply to go after her and bring her back at once; Greta, obeying, had followed the direction Nurse Mysia took, but could not find her in the scrub, nor did she answer when the girl called. So Greta had returned to tell Mr. Northbrook, but when she got to the hut there was a horse which she knew as the boundary rider's tethered up outside the rails and Malpus Brown himself was in Mr. Northbrook's room, talking very loud and angrily. They were talking about Nurse Mysia, because Greta heard them mention her name several times.

Then Greta knocked and Malpus Brown opened

the door to her, and when she told Mr. Northbrook she couldn't find nurse, Malpus Brown said, "Leave her alone, I'll go myself. Who has a better right?" Mr. Northbrook didn't seem to know that it was Malpus Brown, because he called him by another name; but when questioned by Edna, Greta could not remember what the other name was. Oh! but they were so angry with each other, especially the shepherd Malpus Brown, who spoke roughly, and then Greta got frightened at being there alone, and ran away along the track to meet Sallust and tell him to hurry and see what was the matter at the hut.

This intelligence was received by Edna with very mixed sensations. From what she could gather there was something more than mere exhaustion through illness to account for the present state of unconsciousness which had seized Roger. Whatever was the true state of affairs, it was very evident that both Nurse Mysia and Malpus Brown were in some mysterious way associated with it. What that association was she could not even conjecture, and very wisely decided that it must remain a mystery for the present, and that it was but waste of precious time to try and elucidate it by further questioning Greta. Her first duty now was to see Roger Northbrook safely at the homestead, where she could give him the care and attention his condition needed, and after that to despatch searchers for Nurse Mysia, who had so unaccountably forsaken her post at such a critical juncture and from all reports had done so deliberately.

At this moment there was a very ominous roar in the far distance that warned Edna the fire had crossed the Kimo Ranges, and that there was little time to lose, for a dull leaden glare which pervaded the south-eastern sky heralded the oncoming fire. Night had set in and except for this copper colored light that hung low upon the horizon, it was quite dark. There was no moon and the heavens were obscured by the density of the smoke and thick haze that hung

over the whole landscape, making the firmament above appear like a grey abyss.

Edna had quite expected to have the assistance of Nurse Mysia in the work of removing Roger, but as she was absent there was nothing for it but to enlist the aid of the servants and get the invalid out of the hut and placed upon the mattress that had been provided upon the floor of the "overlander." Edna had plenty of strong determination to face any difficulties, so she set herself to work, and with Peter, Sallust and Greta, managed without a hitch to effect Roger's removal.

When everything was ready, and the unconscious man tucked safely in among the rugs and blankets which had been lavishly supplied by the thoughtful hands of Mrs. Esbourne, Edna gave a deep sigh of relief as she wiped her heated face, and murmured:

"Thank God that is finished and he is not hurt. Now if he would only regain consciousness."

"Indeed, Miss, the nurse couldn't 'a done it better, I'll be bound!" remarked Peter, who was standing near, perspiring freely from his exertions as the heat was almost overpowering.

"Thank you, Peter, but I have to remember that I couldn't have done it alone," returned Edna. "Now we must get away at once, but what are we to do about the nurse?" she asked anxiously.

"Oh! Nurse Mysia will be all right if Malpus Brown has gone to look for her," interjected Peter.

"But we are not certain that he has, and we cannot go and leave her alone in the bush to-night, with these fires threatening. It would be too awful. Yet we dare not remain longer here with Mr. Northbrook in this condition. What can I do now, anyway?" she concluded, in a tone of anxiety, looking from one to the other of the men by her side.

"Don't you worry, Miss Edna, please don't now," said Sallust, in a voice of kindly assurance that spoke his sympathy for his young mistress in her dilemma. "Now it's just my opinion that she's missed her way in this thick smoke; but if Malpus Brown's gone a'ter

her then she oughter be found, for he's the most wonderful bushman is Malpus! If he can't find her no one else on this 'ere run can, I'll wager!" he concluded, with a sagacious shake of his big head with its shock of thick red hair.

"Well, if Malpus Brown's took it in his 'ead to do a good turn to anyone, let alone a woman, then it'll be time for the moon to turn green," interjected Peter cynically.

"Yet we'll give him the benefit of the doubt, Peter, and hope he has done so this time," remarked Edna. "Were it possible I would go and look for her myself, but I cannot leave Mr. Northbrook," she added.

"There ain't the least need, Miss Edna," interposed Sallust. "It's me as is a-going, and with the two of us—me and Malpus—it's safe and sure she'll be found allright. 'Safe bind, safe find,' yer knows, Miss," he concluded.

"Will you really go, Sallust, and risk the fire?" asked Edna, eagerly turning to the man.

"In course I will, Miss, and right away, too," he answered cheerily. "I'm not likely to go and leave the poor young nuss to spend the night in the bush. Not me!" he affirmed, as he stepped over to where his horse was tethered, tugging restlessly at its bridle, for its keen instincts scented the danger approaching, and it was eager to get away.

"Oh! Sallust, thank you so much, I'm sure you'll succeed in finding her," cried Edna gratefully.

"Are you going without a lantern?" asked Peter.

"What's the good o' a lantern to me?" retorted Sallust, in a tone of contempt. "Dark and light's all the same in the bush to my eyes. I'm like a cat—I can see as well in either. Though they do say as some loves darkness i'stead o' light because o' their evil deeds; but I'm not one as is pertickler what is top-most."

"True, Sallust," said Edna quickly, "you know that God is in the darkness as well as the light, and

wherever we recognise God there is light and safety. So go, Sallust, and God guide you!"

"Thank you, miss, I'll do my best you'll see," he replied as he rode off into the bush in the direction Greta pointed out to him as the way Mysia had gone.

When all was ready Edna suddenly remembered that it might be possible Nurse Mysia would find her way back to the hut alone, without encountering either of the horsemen who were out in search of her, in which case it would cause her great distress to find the place deserted and no explanation given. Without a moment's hesitation she ran back into the hut, obtained writing materials, and hurriedly scribbled a note:—

DEAR NURSE GRAYSON,

The bush fires are reported to be coming this way. Our pastures are in the track and this place is not considered safe. I have taken Mr. Northbrook to the homestead. I found him unconscious. The two shepherds have gone to search for you. Don't hesitate to come on to the homestead at once with them. I will send for you when I get back if you are not reported found. Cannot now wait with safety to Mr. Northbrook. Hope you will get back all right.

Yours sincerely,

Edna B. Esbourne.

This note Edna placed under the edge of the lamp-stand, where Mysia could not fail to see it should she return alone to the hut. Then leaving the lamp burning brightly and the doors wide open, Edna mounted to the back of the buggy, having made Greta get up beside Peter, who was driving back, and placed herself down by the side of Roger Northbrook, so that she might render him any aid on the way, should the jolting restore him to consciousness.

While they drove rather slowly through the now silent bush they could hear in the distance an ever increasing roar like the sound of breakers on a rocky

coast, and the farther they went the louder it seemed to be, while the air around them was rapidly becoming more suffocating. Experience led Edna to the unwelcome conclusion that instead of leaving the fire behind them they were in reality getting nearer to the one from the other side of the range, which must have crossed within the last hour or two and even now might have cut off their approach to the homestead. There was another track by which they might reach the house, but it was so rough and stump-strewn that with a sick man in her care and the night so dark, Edna felt it was better to risk a race with the fire than the danger of an upset. Her anxiety about Roger had increased as the time passed and there was no apparent improvement in his condition. She constantly moistened his lips with water, and chafed his brow and hands, but without effect. At length she determined to try if she could concentrate her mind upon the One Life, and closing her eyes she held his hand in hers and made an honest effort to do so; but her surroundings were momentarily getting worse and she felt too keenly the responsibility of her position and the charge that was then hers, while her faith was not yet sufficiently strong for all needs. So she decided she would try what the sound of her voice would do, and stooping she called close to his ear—

“Roger! Roger! Speak to me, say can you hear me, Roger?” Then she waited for a few seconds and called again and still again, with no results. Then she resigned herself and sat still, just quietly breathing a prayer that he might be safe and well, when presently she was startled by the sound of his voice that smote upon her ears with a sharpness that was almost painful:

“Mysia! Mysia! Where are you?”

Edna peered down into the white upturned face, now almost hidden by the thick dark beard which had grown during his illness, and saw by the dim light of the buggy lamps that he had regained consciousness. His eyes were open and he was trying to discover where

he was. Stooping over him, she laid her hand on his brow and whispered gently—

“Roger, you are better, are you not? Oh! I am so glad.”

“Mysia, you have come back! Why did you go like that? Where am I?” he articulated faintly.

“You are quite safe, Roger. Have no fear!” responded Edna in a faint voice, not quite knowing what to think or say.

“Mysia, I saw him—Reg. Vernon—he is Malpus Brown the shepherd, he is not to be trusted. Mysia, did he find you?”

A quick pain darted through Edna’s heart at his words and for a second she could not find her voice to speak to him. She saw that Roger was still mistaking her for the nurse; that he had not yet recognised her nor remembered her voice. Then she said again, bending close over him this time and looking into his eyes:

“Mr. Northbrook, it is I. Do you not know me? See, it is Edna ——”

She paused, while his eyes sought her face with a questioning puzzled gaze—then he stretched out his hand to feel for hers, which she gave him—and he murmured:

“Edna! Oh! it is really Edna? Why have you stayed from me so long, *Edna*?”—the last word he dwelt on tenderly, lingeringly.

“Hush, dear friend, you must be quiet, you have not been well and I cannot allow you to talk now,” protested Edna, gently.

“But where am I? Why are we moving?” he persisted. “And—and—where is Nurse Mysia?”

“You will hear everything when we get home,” replied Edna soothingly, not wishing to reveal their danger to him if possible, knowing that his own helplessness would only make it the more distressful to him. She sat back thinking, wondering where he had heard that name? What connection it could have with him—with the nurse, or with Malpus Brown, the taciturn shepherd of whom she had heard but had

never seen? Reg. Vernon! What did Roger know of Reginald Vernon, she wondered? Just then his voice once again broke into her reverie, saying—

“Where is Mysia? You have not told me if she is back safely.”

Before Edna could reply there was an exclamation of terror from Peter and a wild scream from Greta, both of whom sat high above Edna, shutting out the view of the road ahead. Rising to her knees in the buggy, Edna looked over the side and beheld a sight before them that made the blood leave her face and freeze in her veins for the moment.

They had just turned a bend in the track and about half a mile ahead of them was a mighty wall of writhing flames, which was travelling at a terrific rate across the thickly ringbarked belt of country through which they were to pass, for their road lay parallel with the oncoming fire. At the rate it was travelling it threatened to cross the road before they should have reached the point where they could cut across country, and so race it through the cleared grass paddocks of her father's run. Where they were now was all thick scrub, fenced off on each side of the track, and it was on the left of this track that the fire was racing towards them with the swiftness of galloping horses. Edna saw that it was inevitable that this portion of her father's fine grassed paddocks would fall a prey to the greedy flames; but her one anxiety was how were they to escape it unless they could reach the slip-rails, about a mile beyond the point where they now were? There was no going back, and no track through the scrub, nor would the character of the country permit of their burning a break. A mile farther on, and there was just a chance that they might race it with a hope of winning, but should it cross the track first then they would be overtaken.

“What shall we do, Miss Edna?” exclaimed Peter, pulling the horses up till they reared on their haunches.

“You must drive on, Peter!” commanded Edna.

“We'll never get through in time, miss; it'll be

on us and that's certain death. We had better turn back, miss," persisted the man.

"No! no, certainly not!" cried Edna, "where would you turn to with any hope of getting safely home in our present conditions? There's nothing for it but to go on. We must face it without a moment's delay," she asserted emphatically.

"Och! Mein Gott! Mein Gott! Ve vill be burnt to zinders!" wailed Greta, covering her eyes to shut out the awful spectacle.

"Hold your tongue, Greta!" commanded Edna authoritatively. "Come, climb over here to the back, and cover yourself up with this rug and be quiet."

Very willingly the girl obeyed her young mistress, and, clambering over the back of the seat, was soon crouched down beside Roger Northbrook, trembling with fright. Edna, who feared from the German girl's inexperience, that should she see the worst they were about to face, she might in her terror be tempted to leap from the vehicle, gave her a last warning injunction in the words "Be still and say nothing, keep your eyes covered and I'll save you, Greta."

Then turning to Roger, in a strained and anxious voice Edna said, "Roger, you know we are in danger from the bush fires. We must face them and that at once. Remember you are crippled and cannot help me so much as by lying quite still and leaving the issue with God; our lives are now in His hands. Give me your strongest thoughts and have faith in my power to get safely through. Will you promise me this?"

"Yes, Edna, I will. God give you strength and courage to win through," he responded, as he grasped her hand: she returned the pressure, and the next moment had climbed over the back of the seat beside the groom. Then Roger Northbrook rose on his elbow and looked over the side of the buggy ahead and saw what it was this woman was about to face. It was a sight he never forgot. Was it with this she was going to try a race? That sea of living rolling flames?

Surely it was impossible? But he dared not now attempt to protest, he had promised to be still, so with a groan and a half-whispered prayer, the man subsided upon his mattress on the floor of the buggy and gave himself up to obey the woman's command to be still.

The horses had now become restive and attempted to turn round, being unwilling to face the terrible sight ahead of them. Peter could not manage them and some valuable time was lost. Then Edna took the reins from the groom's hands, saying:

"Let me have them, Peter! The mare knows my touch and voice better than yours; if she will obey, the other will too."

Then with a few encouraging words to the terrified animals, and a last injunction to those behind, bidding them "hold tight and keep quiet!" Edna took a firm grip upon the reins and urged her horses forward. They plunged and resisted for a few seconds, then, answering to Edna's voice and with every nerve quivering and every muscle straining, the noble beasts leaped forward and broke into a gallop. The buggy rocked and swayed like a ship at sea in a storm, and seemed to plunge and bound towards that blazing wall of glowing fire.

As far as they could see, the whole countryside seemed to be ablaze, and the glare accentuated by the darkness of the night, made the scene resemble a huge furnace whose doors had been suddenly thrown open, while tongues of flame leaped out and wound themselves around the trunks of the tall gum trees, running up their long branches with lightning rapidity hundreds of feet into the air and above the tops of the tallest trees, leaping from one to another in the most fantastic fashion till in this manner the fire was travelling overhead at an incredible rate of speed with the wind behind it; while below it licked up the dry grass and parched undergrowth greedily, running along the ground in little rivers of flame that spread their octopus arms in all directions.

On, on, on! came this terrible foe, till with one

bound it leaped the cleared track not a quarter of a mile ahead of them, and was racing over the dry grass clearings of "Cumbooqueepa" Station. Still faster and faster, Edna urged her terrified horses till the pace was such that at times the wheels of the buggy seemed not to touch the ground and the occupants could scarcely retain their balance, and were in danger of being hurled out. On each side of them ahead the fire was now raging; fences were burning fiercely and the fury of the flames increased as they greedily fastened upon fresh fuel. The blast of its furnace-like heat now struck them with relentless force, hurling sparks, burnt leaves and bark into their faces and nearly suffocating them with dense clouds of smoke.

At one moment it seemed they must be burned alive as they travelled, for the rugs in which Mr. Northbrook was wrapped began to smoulder and then suddenly burst into flame. A cry from Greta called Peter's attention to the danger and he promptly poured the contents of the water-bag over them, while he also had to keep a continual watch upon his own and Edna's clothing to prevent ignition. Now they were right in the midst of it; the heat was awful; the smoke suffocating. Their eyes burned in the sockets and tears born of the smarting were dried up before they could fall. Their lips and nostrils tingled and cracked with the fierce heat; their tongues clove to the roof of their mouths and their breath came in short gasps.

Not one of that little party spoke a word or uttered a sound throughout the awful minutes which sufficed to pass between that fiery barrier. Indeed, there was no breath to spare for speech, it was needed to keep the life in their bodies; and words were powerless to help or save; it was action, prompt and deliberate, that alone would enable them to win through.

With a bravery and courage that was wonderful, Edna stuck to her seat and kept a firm grip upon the reins, though her hands were burnt beneath the skin gloves she wore. Her hair and eyebrows were singed,

and the skin of her face seemed to be shrivelling in the blast of that fiery furnace, but she dare not attempt to protect it, as she required all her vigilance to guide and control the terrified horses. At one time her hat caught fire, but with wonderful presence of mind Peter tore it off and threw it from them. Then a fresh danger menaced Edna, for her thick wavy hair was exposed and would have caught alight but for the forethought of the groom who noticed her dangerous condition and, snatching the soft felt hat from off his own head, promptly placed it upon his brave young mistress, pulling the broad brim well down over her face and thus protecting her eyes from the heat more effectually than her own had done. As for him, his short hair was not in so great danger.

At such moments there was no time for thanks or recognition of such acts of self-sacrifice ; all Edna could do was to think silent prayers for strength, and urge her horses to greater speed if that were possible, or necessary, since fright had already lent wings to their feet and, like Pegasus, they literally flew over that burning track. The minutes occupied in passing through the worst point of the journey seemed like hours, so interminable did it appear to their strained nerves and half-stunned senses. Then they emerged upon a wide track of burnt country with no roadway visible except where the outlines of charred and still burning posts marked where the fences had been to denote the station boundary.

But, though the worst was past, the danger was not yet over. Logs, stumps and trees were still burning furiously on the ringbarked ridge, although the wind had swept the main body of the fire past them and it was now rolling and roaring away across the paddocks, speeding on to junction with the great volume of fire that was sweeping up the valley of the Murrumbidgee, where the two would probably meet and join forces in a vast sea of flame.

The ground was strewn with hundreds of dead rabbits and other vermin, roasted alive, which had

been unable to escape before they were overtaken by the fire. The manes, tails and coats of the horses Edna was driving were singed ; the harness and woodwork of the buggy was burned and blistered ; indeed, it was a wonder the traces held together under the severe strain they were subjected to throughout that desperate gallop. At one point of the road, where they had turned off to avoid the worst of the fire by crossing the paddocks, there were several gates down which would otherwise have needed to be opened to admit them from one paddock to another. These were plainly revealed by the light of the fire, which had made the darkness of the night as bright as day. The rail fences were burned through and allowed the buggy to cross over the entire stretch of lower paddocks on the station, without having to deviate to reach the gates.

As they careered across the country, now charred and burning beneath the feet of the racing horses, it was a miracle that they were not overturned by contact with burnt rails or stumps ; but the hand of a merciful Providence had certainly guided them safely through the immediate dangers of that awful experience ; while Edna's wonderful self-control and undaunted courage, in the hour of peril, had seemed to impart itself to others, and even the terrified beasts seemed inspired to put forth their best efforts in response to the firm but gentle hand that held the reins and guided them to safety that terrible night.

Another fifteen minutes' driving over suchlike charred ground and they at length emerged round the bend that brought the homestead in view. From the first glance it was evident that the fire had only crossed a corner of the run and the home paddocks were safe, as also was the homestead. The wind had driven the fire in an oblique direction, so that it had missed the main portion of the pasture lands which this time were saved. All was commotion round the homestead. The fire-beaters were out in hundreds, using all possible endeavors to keep the fire from the home paddocks in case the wind should change

and drive it around in their direction. The most intense anxiety prevailed as to the safety of Edna and the party from the hut. Men were sent out on horse-back in every direction by which it was considered likely she would return. Mr. Esbourne himself had ridden along the main track to the margin where he saw the fire cross his own paddocks, and when he beheld the big blaze that confronted him, which would surely block their progress if they had attempted to come that way, he naturally concluded it was beyond the bounds of possibility for them to get through alive. So he had promptly sent his men along the back sheep track, thinking that Edna would have managed to reach that safer though more circuitous route before the fire could cut off their approach.

What then was the squatter's surprise to behold Edna driving up the main track in the direction of the homestead. The utmost astonishment prevailed, and exclamations of wonder at the daringness of the undertaking were heard among the station hands as with one accord they gave the fugitives a hearty cheer of welcome. The hearts of these strong, rough men—though rough only in exterior, for when put to the test they were kind and gentle as a woman to those in distress—were filled with admiration for a deed which some of them doubted if they themselves could have had the courage and fearlessness to perform.

As their "hurrahs" rent the air, Edna was lifted from her seat by her father's strong loving arms; but the welcome fell upon deaf ears with a far-away sound as though heard by her from a distant sphere, and then she remembered no more. The strain was over; the tension was snapped, and Edna had quietly swooned under the reaction.

CHAPTER XXV.

A LIFE'S HARVEST GARNERED.

"Mark how men drain every cup of pleasure, until sensibility wears out; and then health wears out; and then ability to feel wears out. Give me the poet or teacher who will put a true picture of this before men, and he shall do the age a golden service."

—REV. R. H. HAWEIS, M.A.

Mysia had slept on through several hours, oblivious of all that had passed, unconscious of the near approach of danger and death in that now silent bush. At last she was awakened by a voice that called her by her name.

"Mysia! Mysia! Wake up!"

With a start she half rose to feel a hand upon her shoulder while the form of a man was bending over her. A man with a thick dark beard and shaggy hair, whose face and form were strange to her, yet who had called her by her name, in a voice that was familiar and yet half forgotten like a dream of the past. The strangeness of it all, the darkness of the evening, the sombre silent bush all around her, and the presence of that strange man bending over her, terrified her to such a degree that she was speechless for a few seconds and then only found her voice to give vent to a shrill scream of terror, and, burying her face in her hands, crouched in a heap upon the ground where she had been sleeping.

"Mysia! Mysia! Don't be afraid. I won't hurt you! Look up. Do you not know me?" said the voice of the man by her side.

Mysia gained courage at the reassuring tones and the familiar voice, though the face was so strange and terrifying, while the gloom of the bush made it difficult to distinguish the features.

"No! I don't know you. Who are you?" she gasped. "What do you want with me?" And as she spoke she shrank away from the bearded face pushed down so close to her own.

The man then rose and striking a match lit a small pocket lantern and, holding it in one hand, he lifted his hat off with the other, and as he did so removed

with it a heavy wig, which he let fall to the ground, revealing a close-cropped head of iron grey hair which quite transformed his appearance. Then he repeated calmly :

"Now you recognise me, Mysia, I think ! Do you not ? "

"Reginald ! Reginald Vernon ! Can it be ? " she cried, but he finished the sentence for her by saying deliberately :

"Yes, it is your husband, Reginald Vernon. Surely I have sadly changed when even my own wife does not know me ? "

"Why are you here ? What brought you here ? " she gasped faintly.

"You do not seem too pleased to see me, Mysia ? Perhaps you wish I had not been here ? You had no wish to meet me again, eh ? "

Mysia made no answer, but sat crouched at the foot of the tree, staring at the strange figure of the man before her with surprise, not unmingled with alarm, in her face. What had brought him there ? Where had he come from ? How did he find her there in the bush alone ? These were the questions that were flashing through her mind while she sat gazing at him.

"Have you no warmer welcome than this for me ? " he inquired harshly, evidently nettled at her attitude towards him and her general demeanour. "Perhaps you are sorry I am here to interfere with your freedom ! Hoped I was dead probably ! Would have liked to bestow your favors upon Roger Northbrook. Eh ? " he sneered.

The words and tone stung Mysia to action, for she rose to her feet and stood supporting herself against the trunk of the tree as she answered indignantly—

"Why should I welcome you back, Reg. Vernon ? You, who deserted me and left me penniless after squandering my fortune. I —— "

"Because I am your husband," he replied, calmly eyeing her.

"You forfeited your claims as a husband when

you treated me as you did five years ago. I no longer love or respect you. I shall never, never forgive, nor forget! Never!" she repeated emphatically.

"I am not here for that purpose now, though I had intended to seek that boon from you later when some other business which brought me to this place, was first completed," he answered.

Then it struck her how strange it was he should be there and know she was there also. He had not answered her first inquiry, so she repeated it more sharply:

"What brought you here? How did you know I was here? And why are you here in disguise, wearing that?" pointing to the discarded wig at his feet.

"I am here because I belong here. I work on this station as a stock-rider," he returned.

"You!" she ejaculated.

"Yes, I was here before you or Northbrook came. I was here for reasons of my own that I may disclose to you later, but I did not expect such a shoal of surprises as have met me here. Roger Northbrook a visitor, and *you* his nurse, and—and other things."

"You have seen me before to-night, then?" she suggested.

"Oh! yes, many times. I have waited and watched for you when you went for your morning walks in the bush. I have been quite close to you without your knowing it, though once you nearly discovered me," he admitted, watching her keenly the while.

Then she remembered having got a fright that morning when she chanced to hear a noise in the undergrowth near where she was seated on a fallen log, and fearing blacks hastened away, and later noticed a horseman riding through the bush in the distance, but thought no more of it, concluding it was but one of the station hands out after the sheep.

"Who are you, then," she questioned curiously. "What name do you go by here? Not your own, surely?"

"I am known on this station as 'Malpus Brown' ——" he began.

"What! Malpus Brown?" she echoed. "Then you are the man who lived in the hut where I am nursing Mr. Northbrook?"

"The same!" he affirmed, with a nod of his head that was still bare and looked rather grotesque with its crop of thin grey hair against the thick black beard that nearly covered his face and hid its expression. Only the eyes revealed what he was feeling—anger, passion or pain—during this interview.

"Then—then," she faltered, light dawning upon her while she spoke, "then the book I found was yours, and that was how the photograph—that old photo of myself taken years ago—" Then she paused as her voice faltered, choking in her throat, and a wave of bitter memories rushed to her brain as she remembered all the fierce joy she had tasted and the heart agonies she had endured since that faded picture was found by her in Reg. Vernon's old book—and now, now she was here alone—had forsaken her patient—neglected her duties in a fit of jealous rage, and he, this man who claimed her as his wife, was her husband. He now stood before her, just as she had come to this point of desperation, this crisis in her life. These thoughts were surging through her mind when his voice again roused her, saying in hard metallic tones—

"Yes, this is the photograph you mean, I suppose!" drawing the faded card out of the bosom of his shirt, and holding it towards her.

"Where, oh! where did you get it?" she exclaimed in alarm. "Have you been to the hut? Have you seen ——" "

"Yes, I have been to the hut, and I have seen Roger Northbrook," he admitted. "That is where I obtained *this*."

"Did he tell you ——" she began, but then stopped confusedly.

"No. He did not tell me what I most wanted to

know, though he told me much. But I have come to you here to-night to learn the truth for myself."

"How did you know I was here?" she asked, feeling relieved at his answer.

"I saw you leave the hut as I rode up. It was my intention to call upon you both and wish you a merry Christmas, but when you went off as you did, I knew I should find you later all right, so I just had my interview with him first." The tones of the man's voice sounded cold and cynical to Mysia's ears and awakened a feeling of fierce rebellion within her breast.

"What did you want to see Rog—— Mr. Northbrook about?"

"Oh! don't mince matters with me, Mysia. Call him Roger, by all means; it comes more natural, I suppose. You are not the only woman to whom I've had first claim that he has meddled with. I ——"

"How dare you speak to me in that manner, and of him, too!" she flashed hotly.

"Do you mean to tell me that he has not made love to you? Eh!" he sneered.

"I deny your right to question me," she retorted.

"Then Roger Northbrook is not your lover—has never been your lover nor had the audacity to wish to be? Is that correct?"

Mysia was silent, but it was the silence of indignation, not guilt. The silence that could find no words adequate to express what she felt. She was burning with impotent rage.

"Ha! So you've no answer for me, I observe; and neither had he when I taxed him with his perfidy just now. He was silent enough too when I left him to seek you, and he has only himself to thank for it all," he concluded in tones that sounded menacing to Mysia's terrified ears.

Then an awful fear flashed upon her. Perhaps—yes, perhaps Reg. and Roger had quarrelled. They were alone. He might have done him an injury. There was no one to protect him, and Reg. filled with jealous rage, too! The thought nearly suffocated her, and

springing forward she threw herself upon Reg. Vernon with her arms clasped round his body, crying distractedly :

"Reg. ! Tell me, for mercy's sake, tell me you have not hurt him ? You have not murdered Roger ? Say it is not so ? " she almost shrieked.

"Oh ! is that it, then you are anxious about your lover and not about your husband," he hissed, trying to throw her off, but she only clung more tightly to him in her terror.

"He is not my lover. Reg., listen to me. I swear to you he is not, in the way you mean ! I have no lover, no one to love me ! I am your own faithful wife. Reg., I vow that Roger Northbrook has done you no harm ! "

"You swear it, Mysia ! " he demanded, looking down into her white upturned face almost fiercely. "Swear it by God ! "

"I swear it," she repeated. "Yes, yes, by the love of God ; by the love I have for my little child, my son—our child, Reg.," she asserted solemnly, in hoarse overstrung tones.

"What ! *your child* ! Did you say you have a child ? " he cried hoarsely. "Whose child ? "

"Yours—ours—Reg. ! Our little son," she gasped, still clinging to him wildly. "Now tell me—tell me that Roger is safe ! "

"Yes, yes, he is safe. I've done him no harm," he said, roughly pushing her away from him and looking into her face with burning eyes that would have searched her very soul to its depths.

"*Our child*, did you say ? " he repeated harshly. "I did not know *we* had a child ! Tell me when it was born. Tell me the truth, Mysia, for God's sake ! " he said imploringly.

"I am—I have—told you the truth. How can you doubt me ? I have never told you a lie, Reg.," she asserted more calmly and looking at him steadily

as she spoke ; her whole heart filled with a great gratitude to know that Roger at least was safe from his vengeance.

" When was it born ? " he repeated sternly.

" My baby boy was born six and a half months after you left me, and I have worked for him and myself ever since," she said.

" A boy, a son—our son—did you say ? " he repeated musingly.

" Yes, yes," she answered impatiently, " I have told you. He is five years old now. I called him Reggie after you because then—then—I thought you loved me, but—but ——," here she broke down and covered her face with her hands, while she was shaken with hysterical sobs.

With a quick grip that was almost cruel in its intensity, the man caught her to his bosom and held her close to his heart in a passionate embrace, while he kissed her face and hair and eyes madly, then said in thick broken tones :

" My wife, my love ! my only love ! *You thought* I loved you ! You *knew* I loved you—loved only you—you, the sweetest, loveliest woman in all God's world ! Mysia ! my Mysia ! I have been loved by many women, but I—I have loved but one, yourself, my sweet one, my wife—my little child-wife that was ! " Then he caressed her, and his voice was saddened when he spoke again : " You thought I was cruel when I left you, Mysia ? Dear, I left you to save you from worse trouble, to redeem myself in your eyes, to make myself worthy of your pure self ! Now, Mysia, I have come back—was coming to you later had I not met you here so strangely—to compensate you for all you have suffered : to dispel all those dark days. They are gone for ever. I have made plenty of gold—all for you—and am going to spend my life in making your life bright and happy. Yes, and our child, Mysia, our little son, I am eager to see him and hear him call me father ! Come, dear, sit down here and tell me all about our boy ? " and he led her back to the place

where she had been seated and placed himself beside her, his arms encircling her while his whole being was filled with a new joy ; for Reg. Vernon dearly loved this woman who was his wife and had loved her with the only true pure love of his life. Then when he had soothed her sufficiently, he listened to the story she had to tell : the sad story of a deserted wife's struggle for daily bread ; her fight with a world that is always cruel to the helpless, poor, and forsaken ones. There were moments when her heart welled over with bitterness and her tongue did not hesitate to sting him with its poisoned darts of keen reproach. At one point of the story he sprang to his feet and paced up and down in front of her in great perturbation of mind till it came to the point in her life where she had met Roger Northbrook. Here he again began to question her closely, and in her opinion, cruelly ; for this man's jealous suspicions were aroused and he was apt to be unjust and ungenerous ; considering how great was the wrong he had himself done this woman whom he called wife, though he had failed to fill the place of a husband for so many long years. Mysia resented his words and tone and rose, exclaiming angrily :

" If you cannot speak more respectfully of Mr. Northbrook and more kindly to me, I refuse to stay and listen to you."

Then his heart smote him and he once again caught her to his breast and pleaded with her to forgive him ; begged her to listen to what he called his " life's confession," which he wanted to make to her now, before they went forth into the world again and were known as husband and wife. At these words a cold chill crept over Mysia, as she remembered that she could never again be his wife, for she could not love him. Oh ! yes, she felt she would rather die than be compelled to live with Reg. Vernon now that she knew she loved Roger Northbrook so madly, so devotedly as she did. A feeling of repulsion came over her and she tried to disengage herself from Reg.'s embrace ; but he only held her the more tightly and kissed her the

more passionately, imploring her to say she forgave him—that she loved him!

“ You do love me, Mysia, my own dear wife! Say that you love me, dearest! ” he pleaded hungrily.

But this was his retribution, surely, for Mysia did not love him, and could not say she did. The recollection of that other scene at the hut, only a few short hours ago, flashed over her with such intensity of longing, and the contrast in her feelings was so vivid, so painful, that she felt she should scream if he did not release her. Every kiss he gave her seemed to scorch her flesh: to sting her like a whip lash. It was unbearable. So with one quick wrench she freed herself from her husband's arms and flung herself down upon the ground in a passion of bitter tears. Tears that were born of self-pity at her cruel fate—her hapless lot—that she should passionately love one man whom she could not have for her own and who did not love her; while here at her side was the man who had the right to call her his wife, and whom she was now convinced loved her as dearly as she desired to be loved—as she loved Roger—and yet she had no love for him: nothing but a great repulsion towards him. His very touch made her shrink from him; his voice angered her; and she was conscious of a fierce rebellion that he should have come into her life again—that he was even alive to claim her allegiance or demand a share of the love of her boy—her little Reggie!

These distressing and disturbing thoughts were surging through her as she lay there prostrate and shaken by great sobs, till her worn-out frame was aching from the strain of so many mingled sensations: such deep heart-racking emotions as she had been subjected to that eventful Christmas Eve.

Reginald Vernon stood calmly looking at Mysia where she lay, or rather crouched, in her utter abandonment, wondering not at her distress, because of the nervous state she was then in. He gazed at her long and earnestly through the half-gloom that was over the bush and which had gradually grown less, while a

light like that of the early dawn in the east crept over the forest, but so engrossed was he in his own thoughts and contemplation of her that he did not notice the change in their surroundings. This was the woman whom he called his wife and whom he had so long neglected; had left young and inexperienced to face the buffetings of a hard and unsympathetic world; and what to him was worse to think upon—left to the mercy of men such as he himself had been to similarly forsaken and unprotected women. He remembered the time when any young woman, neglected wife, or innocent girl, with any claim to personal charms, whom “luck”—as he termed it—threw into his path, would have been fair game to him, and he would have lost no time in subduing her to his own evil desires. No amount of money would have been too much to spend upon her in his determination to win her favors, which once possessed he would have cast aside as easily as he had the wig that now lay at his feet—once he had won his purpose a disguise was no longer necessary because he stood forth in his true colors—those of the profligate!

Then what were the feelings of this man, knowing his own sex (or a class of them) as he so well did, when he looked upon this fair woman before him and remembered how great must have been the temptations to which he had left her exposed through all those five years. Had she escaped the touch of such creatures as he knew himself to have been in his early youth, and even up to the time when he imposed upon her good old father and her innocent self for the sake of the fortune she should inherit? How he now despised himself and anathematized all men who, like himself, had sown seeds in early life to poison the lives of others and cause them to reap these bitter harvests of remorse and retribution!

He had thought she was unfaithful to him, as he had been to another; that this was his punishment; and that the man who had been his friend had won her heart in his absence, and enjoyed the pleasures of

her society without the attendant responsibilities of a husband. It is to be feared that Reginald Vernon was inclined to weigh other men's actions in the same scales as his own ; to measure another's sense of honor by his own rather low standard ; and so he attributed the same unworthy motives to Roger's interest and regard—even love—for Mysia, as had actuated him in his own dealings with women during the years of his wild-oat sowing !

Reginald Vernon's ideals were not high, and the models which he had taken for his criterion of a man's life were certainly those of a very inferior class ; and not such as would enable him to build his own moral character upon a very firm basis. He was most lax as to what the standard of a man's code of morals should be ; but—by a strange contradiction, very glaringly revealed in the world of to-day—like all such men whose ideas are expressed on such a low and one-sided plane, he was most exacting as to the virtue of his own women, demanding from the women whom he elected to honor with his rather third-rate love the very highest standard of purity, loyalty and fidelity. Yet, again, like all his class, he was grandly forgetful that it is impossible to have a pure race of women if the fathers of our daughters persist in transmitting to them as an inheritance the accumulated impurities of their own young-manhood ; and thus defile the mothers of our future generations. Then again every man who dishonors another man's sister or wife or daughter, has left the way open for another man to in like manner treat his own loved ones ! Yet, did such defilers ever pause to think where the defiled ones go ? Are they not scattered over the length and breadth of our fair land, like contacts from a plague-stricken region, to spread this blight of impurity among the clean and healthy-minded of our race ; while they who have been the means of propagating this social cancer go on their way for a season, unscathed ; and select for their own a sweet, pure and innocent maiden to wife, as did Reginald Vernon when he abandoned the swine troughs

of his wickedness and married Mysia Grayson ! Ah ! yes, truly the stigma of the Sphinx is written over the whole face of our fair earth till woman's hour of redemption dawns !

If all these thoughts did not exactly pass through the mind of Reginald Vernon at this time, yet he was conscious of experiencing a very keen revulsion of feeling and contempt of himself. He saw the whole of his past life and the despicableness of it. He felt what it was like to be betrayed—or at least he thought he had been—and to know what it was to love with his whole soul one person above all others, and to love them with the best part of his being, yet to be uncertain whether that love was returned ! He realized what joy the news gave him that he was a father, the father of a child, too, by the woman he loved. Other experiences of the same kind had only tended to irritate and annoy him, as interfering with his pleasures. But now a deep joy pulsed through his heart and awakened an exaggerated sense of what was due to Mysia as his wife—as the mother of his son—for he implicitly believed her statements of fidelity. Indeed, he had (now that he recalled the events of those last months spent together in Melbourne when they were apparently devoted husband and wife) serious reason to think that he had been a despicable coward, a mean shirker of his responsibilities from the beginning. He felt for the first time in his life that he was deserving of all the bitter self-reproach he was suffering : all the dark experiences he had been through during the past five years. Reginald Vernon had learned that we do not go forward to meet our future, that it streams up from behind us, over our heads. He now knew that he must bury the past. Yet if Mysia were to be his wife and to forgive him for his past neglect ; and he be reinstated in her heart : she must in the future have no reason to doubt him. She must feel that she could respect him. Perfect love is alone founded upon respect ; and the man or woman who has not deep respect for the other cannot know the meaning of

true Love. That which they call by that name is but a spurious growth, born in an hour, which having no root in itself, and nourished only by the fierce fires of passion, through satiety withers and dies away before the frosts of disillusion, and the wintry winds of poverty and neglect. This is not Love, for LOVE never faileth ; true Love liveth for ever and blesseth him that loveth as her that is beloved.

Reginald Vernon had stood for some time thinking as he watched his weeping wife. Her sobs now began to die away like the wail of a crying child when sleep gradually overpowers it. Then he stepped up to her and, touching her on the shoulder, said :

“ Mysia, sit up and listen to me ; I have something to say to you. Something I should have told you years ago.”

Mysia looked up at him in a weary, disinterested way, but so engrossed was he with his own train of thought that he did not then notice her evident lack of interest in what to him was a trying ordeal. Then with his hands thrust deep in his trousers pockets—a habit of his when thinking or speaking earnestly—and with chin dropped on his breast, and his broad shoulders bent, Reginald Vernon paced slowly up and down within a radius of a few feet in front of where Mysia sat, and began thus :

“ I want to tell you why I treated you as I did five years ago, Mysia. I would wish you to know it from my own lips before anyone else has the chance to tell it to you. You will understand my reason for this when I have finished, and more particularly why I will not meet the Esbournes and be recognised by them as your husband until I am certain that you desire to resume your place by my side ; that I am forgiven by you, and reinstated in your heart as your husband, and the father of your child.”

Mysia was about to protest, but by a movement he stopped her and continued :

“ To be brief, I will skip all my early boyhood

and just tell you that when I was on a visit to my father's relatives in England, I met Roger Northbrook and we became warm friends. We were about the same age and our very dissimilar natures somehow rivetted us together in close friendship. We belonged to the same clubs and were members of one Masonic lodge. Everything was all right till a woman came between us: a girl I got very fond of, and who, I thought, was also fond of me. I learned, however, that it was Roger she really had the deepest affection for, and one night in my jealous rage I met them together and tried to murder her. I stabbed her, threw the knife at Roger and bolted. Of course, I thought she was done for, and I left England secretly. I never heard anything more of the affair and took it for granted that Roger had hushed it up. But to-day I learned from him that the girl did not die. I am not a murderer, at any rate, though I was so in thought, for I meant to kill them both. Roger was not culpable. It appears he had no interest in the girl, but met her accidentally on his way home. He looked after her and from what he tells me she soon after married one who had been a rival of mine at the time, though I had the most money and the girl was mercenary.

"I bore the burden of this imaginary crime for years and the memory of it made me reckless; I plunged into every conceivable dissipation to drown my remorse. I left my home in New Zealand and went to the goldfields of Western Australia, where luck stuck to me and I made plenty of money. Then after a life of self-indulgence I married. I met a lovely woman at the house of a mutual friend in Perth, and fell in love with her, at once proposed and was accepted, and we were married here. The woman was Edna Esbourne ——."

A cry of astonishment escaped Mysia, who had sprung to her feet exclaiming: "You were married before you met me? You married Edna Esbourne? Do you mean *this* Miss Esbourne?" she gasped.

"The same, the very same. I married Edna

Beulah Maya Esbourne, the eldest daughter of Mr. George Esbourne, of "Cumbooqueepa," about nine years ago," he reiterated deliberately.

"Then you —— what were you when you married me? Not her husband, surely?" cried Mysia, speaking breathlessly, for there was a momentary hope in her heart—a hope that was more a joy—that perhaps she was not legally Reg. Vernon's wife. If so, then *she*, and not Edna Esbourne, was free to marry Roger. Oh! if this were but true! Her thoughts were broken by Reg. saying:

"No, Mysia, I am not a bigamist. I was not Edna Esbourne's husband when I met and wedded you. She divorced me. Yes, I gave her good cause, I'll admit. She found it out through the jealousy of the other woman. The shock nearly killed her, she lost her baby, returned home here, and then obtained her freedom. She absolutely refused me an interview when I sought it. It seemed as if she had suddenly turned to stone; that all the fire in her blood had burned out, leaving only a beautiful marble statue. And, by jove! she was a lovely high-spirited creature when I first met and married her; but her ideals were far too high for me. She was too idealistic: too much of an enthusiast. She would wear an ordinary man out to keep pace with her lofty notions. I didn't try long; but just drifted back to one of easier virtue and left Edna to herself. I think she fretted, for she faded very fast. She did not do as other women might have done—seek consolation among the many admirers she had in the city at that time. I think she really loved my worthless self. Yes, I am sure of it now, and I made her a dastardly return for her devotion and fidelity." He paused and paced up and down several times in silence. Then Mysia's voice said—

"Have you seen her since you came here? Does she know you are here on her father's station?"

"No. I have let no one know till I revealed myself to Northbrook to-day and now to yourself. That is my object in speaking so that you shall know all before

we leave this spot. I did see Edna in the distance once but was not brave enough to make myself known to her ; I noticed however that her beautiful raven hair had turned perfectly white. I suppose that is due to the shock I gave her. It's a wonder she recovered from it : she took it so badly."

"Why did you come here at all?" questioned Mysia.

"I came to ascertain how things were with the family, for I borrowed a few thousands off the old gentleman when things went wrong with me, and I meant to meet him quietly and repay it before I set out to search for you in Melbourne, where I thought you still were. But, when I arrived at the station, Mr. Esbourne was in England, and it was the son Leonard who put me on as stockman. He did not know me well enough to recognise me and I have kept well out of the way of the rest of the family."

"Why, though, did you come to Melbourne and get work in my father's warehouse and then marry me? You did not let my father know you had been married before. I am sure he would never have let you have me had he known you were another woman's divorced husband," remarked Mysia indignantly.

"My dear girl, I may as well tell you the truth. I married you because I knew that you were an heiress. I was short of money—without money I am never any good. Someone once told me I was 'never any stronger than my breeches pocket,' and I think they were not far wrong. After Edna left me I began to go downhill fast ; it seemed that my luck forsook me, for everything I touched failed. I got into terrible difficulties and ruin stared me in the face. Then after several desperate splashes in a vain effort to recover myself and get on my feet again I found myself a beggar, and had to admit it ; and I don't doubt but that I might have finished the tragedy with a charge of dynamite only that I had a heavy drinking bout which ended in delirium tremens and typhoid fever. I was put into the hospital, where I lay for many

weeks, forsaken entirely by those who, I once thought, were my friends, and on whom I had lavished thousands of my money in the days when I was 'flush.'

"Nell Allen had her revenge upon me, truly, for she was the only woman who came near me, out of the number with whom I had toyed away my life and my gold. She stuck to me right nobly, but I think it was in the hope that I would marry her for the sake of her two children (mine, of course); but poor old Nell! I gave her the slip when I got better. Cleared out from the West, went over to Melbourne, and there, by chance, got the billet in your father's counting-house, with what result you are aware: he took a fancy to me, invited me to the house, where I met you, and knowing you were an only child, his heiress, well, Mysia, I married you. I won't say now that I did not love you, for I did with all the love my warped and ill-regulated nature was capable of. I know I never really understood the power of love, nor the meaning of virtue for virtue's own sake in woman; chiefly because I would never allow any girls who came into my power to remain as I found them, or else I doubted if they were really what they claimed to be. You were different. There was no mistaking you, Mysia. You were the dearest, sweetest of your sex to me, and it was not passion, but respect—even reverence—that drew my heart to you, even against myself."

"Oh! Reg., how can you say you loved me when you acted as you did? When you lost the fortune that my father worked so hard to make for me?" protested Mysia.

"I did not lose it, I invested it unwisely, dear. After I was made partner in the firm, I had more control over financial affairs, especially after your father's death, you know; then I was ever a plunger and the bank failures, as you are aware, did the rest. Mysia, believe me, dear, I never intended to squander one shilling of your fortune. I had meant to go straight with you, for I had learned to love you then very dearly. But when I saw the crash coming, I

cleared out to avoid the results which I knew my position would bring upon me. I went away to retrieve for you what I had lost, or rather, what the bank failures lost for you. I have done so. I went up to Port Darwin, in Northern Australia, and there I have made money for you—plenty, Mysia. I have it here all safe, and all for you, dear”—tapping his waist as he spoke. “It is in a belt I always wear, and you will never be poor any more. Now I have about finished, Mysia,” he stepped across to where she was standing staring straight in front of her, with a terrified look in her eyes; but he did not seem to see it, so absorbed was he in himself and her—“Mysia, dear, come to me. Come and say you forgive me: that you will take me back to your heart as your own faithful husband. I will be true, dear, you shall never ——”

A fearful scream from Mysia interrupted his speech as she shrieked in terrified accents, and started to run wildly away:

“Look! look! Fire! the fire! Oh! Roger, Roger!”

Turning his head, Reg. Vernon (no longer Malpus Brown) beheld a sight that froze the blood in his veins. Not far from them he could see the tongues of flame leaping across the tops of the tall forest trees, while a lurid glare illumined the entire scene that was not from the rising sun, but emanated from that dreaded visitant the forest fire. It had evidently leaped the river not far from where they were, because nothing else could account for the sudden appearance of this fire now so close to them. Had it come from the opposite direction, he would have seen it, as the latest reports had warned them that the fire was spreading from that quarter. But this—this was both strange and unaccountable to such an experienced bushman, as five years in the back-blocks had made Reg. Vernon.

Turning to look for his horse, he found the animal had fled to seek its own safety. By this time there were several seconds lost to him; and Mysia was

running as fast as her injured ankle would permit, right into the danger zone: right into the fire.

"Mysia, Mysia, come back!" he cried. "Stop, wait for me. Trust to me and I will save you, Mysia!" he shouted after her.

Mysia heeded not, but ran on with all the speed she was then capable of. Reg. darted after her and catching up to her held her by the arm, exclaiming:

"You are running right into the danger. Come with me and I will save you, I know the bush and we can reach the river before the fire gets down that far on this side. Come quickly!"

"No, no! let me go," she cried breathlessly, dragging her sleeve from his clutch. "Roger is alone at the hut, I must save him, I must go back!" And darting from him she half-ran, half-stumbled through the tangle of boughs and twigs.

"You can never reach him, and even so, what can you do alone? You may be sure they have sent for him from the homestead before now. They have seen the fire before it got this far. Don't be a fool, Mysia! You must let me save you!" he persisted.

"I will not go with you; I must, *I will* return to the hut. You can go and leave me and save yourself if you choose. I am going to Mr. Northbrook!" she said angrily as she threw off his detaining hand again, and ran on madly.

Reginald Vernon saw that it was no use struggling with her: that she was determined to return to the hut; and felt that the surest way to save her was to help her effect her purpose. She was already working in a circle and would never reach the hut if he let her alone; for in her excitement she had lost her bearings. For a moment he was tempted to leave her to herself, for the demon of jealousy was aroused again. She was going to Northbrook—he was her first thought in this hour of danger! not he, her husband. Then the better nature of the man asserted itself and he determined to help her. Placing his hand through her arm to support her he said as he ran by her side:

"Then if you will go back, I will come with you. But you are not in the right track. Trust me, Mysia, and I will guide you there."

She did not answer, but let him give what aid he chose, and in breathless silence they ran side by side. The fire was now increasing in volume behind them, and the noise of its roar almost drowned their voices when they spoke. Mysia was limping badly, with her injured ankle, but she would not make any complaint: she bore the pain bravely. She had but one thought, one desire left in life now, that was to reach the hut and ascertain if Roger were safe; and if he were there, to ask his forgiveness; to tell him she did not mean what she said: it was all in anger, because of her jealousy, but now it was all gone, and her heart ached with a keen remorse, a deep regret. Once she had seen him—just once—and heard from him that he was not grieved with her—that he forgave her—then, then nothing else mattered.

By this time they had emerged from the bush and had got into the cleared paddocks of the run. On, on, came the fire behind them, and its hot breath almost stifled them, while bits of burning bark and leaves flew over their heads, set fire to the dry grass of the clearing, and ran along like little rivulets of flame that crackled and spluttered behind them. When they came in sight of the hut, another awful sight met their horrified eyes, for the fire from the other side was rushing over the paddocks of the ten-mile with lightning rapidity, and the hut now stood between two advancing fires. They were thus hemmed in and there was no escape; they must go on and try to reach the hut before the two fires joined forces. The hut might escape, as it stood isolated in the paddock with only the dry grass around it and nothing very inflammable near. A terrified scream burst from poor Mysia's white lips, but she had no breath to voice her fears. She was ready to drop, but still struggled on. At last Reg. found that it would be impossible to reach the hut first, at the rate they were going, so, without asking her leave, he

picked up the half-fainting girl in his strong arms and carried her at a smart trot to the slip-rails, where she slid from his grasp, darted underneath, and rushed into the open door, where the lamp still burned upon the table, just as it was left by Edna.

"Roger! Roger! I have come back! Oh! Roger, are you there?" She gasped, disappearing into the little bedroom, only to find it empty and the whole place deserted. By this time Reg. had also gained the hut and sank upon the bed-chair which had served Mysia as a couch during the whole term of her nursing. At the same moment Mysia emerged from the inner room and with a groan, sank on the floor with her head leaning on the table, buried in her arms. "He is gone! he is not here!" she moaned.

Reginald Vernon sat on the couch with head bent and form bowed, his eyes fixed upon the drooping figure of the woman whom he called wife, but who was now mourning over another man. A terrible bitterness filled his heart. A desolation swept over his soul, and death would have been welcome now—yes, now that he knew that the woman he loved with all the force of his being did not love him: and never would love him, for her heart was already given to another. Yes, *this was his retribution.*

An exclamation from Mysia, who had found the note left by Edna, aroused him, and lifting his head he saw her rise from the table and, with her hand outstretched before him, she said sarcastically:

"Here—here is a letter from your *other wife*! She has saved Roger, he loves her, too! He loves all whom you love, it seems!"

The words and tone stung him to the quick and a demon, that he thought was quelled for ever, awoke in the man's heart, for he snatched the unoffending paper from her hand, saying fiercely:

"Then, by God! he will never get the chance to have the only woman I do love. I'll kill you first!" His eyes blazed and his hands clenched as he spoke

Mysia shrunk away from him in terror and made as though she would rush out of the door, but just as she turned her eyes started almost from their sockets with fear at the sight they beheld, and with an awful cry she threw herself at Reginald Vernon's feet, crying imploringly :

" Oh ! save me, Reg. ! save me ! See, the fire is upon us, the hut is burning ! Reg., for God's sake, save me ! "

" Save you ! " he hissed. " What for ? That you may go to him ? Save you to live and love Roger Northbrook ? *Never !* "

" Oh ! God pity me ! God help me and pity my child, my little Reggie ! " she groaned, springing to her feet again and turning from the man who had thus spurned her in her hour of distress—had failed her for the second time in her short life as his wife. Poor Mysia rushed to the door of the hut and out, away, away from one who was less than human ; anywhere, even into the jaws of death would she go, rather than be near him whom she had called husband !

The words she uttered as she rose, the sound of his child's name—the son whom he had never seen yet loved—aroused Reg. and awakened his better nature till it once more ruled the man. His child, their son ! Oh ! fool ! he had forgotten ! The child was a link that would bind them together in spite of all. Yes, he must save her for the boy's sake !

The next moment he was tearing after her flying form as it again sped down that burning track like a terrified ghost. Fire and smoke was all around them blotting out the landscape till it was possible only to distinguish objects a few hundred yards ahead. Already Mysia was looking phantom-like in the haze as she rushed along the track over which the fires had not yet met. With desperate strides Reg. caught her up and with one bound was by her side and lifting her in his arms held her close to his breast with her face against his shoulder, her bosom pressed to his beating heart. Yes, they should die together if it had come to

that ; but if human effort could save her, then he was resolved to make it. The hut was burning fiercely now, illumining the scene and throwing more light on the track, but the other fires were already gaining on him as he ran on impeded with the added weight of his precious burden. Mysia's breath was coming in gasps now, and he feared she was suffocating with the smoke that enveloped them till they could scarcely see each other's faces. In desperation he cried :

" Mysia, darling, forgive me : say you are all right ! Mysia, can you hear me ? " She did not speak and her head lay heavily on his shoulder. " Speak to me, dear one ; quick ! say that you forgive me, say it for the child's sake ! " he pleaded.

" Yes," she gasped thickly, then murmured, " Oh ! Reggie, my son, my little son ! God pity you, Reggie ! " The last word was almost a shriek, and stabbed Reg. to the heart by its tone of awful despair. But it also urged him to greater efforts, for he plunged desperately on, saying in a voice that tried to be brave and hopeful, " Mysia, bear up ! I think I can save you if I can hold out a little longer. Mysia, kiss me, dear ! "

But Mysia was past hearing, and in an agony of spirit he bent over the white face that lay against his arm and stood out so plainly in that lurid light, and—with a heart that was bursting with its passion of love that knew it had come too late—kissed the parted lips.

A great sob rose in Reg.'s throat ; he felt the hot breath of the fires upon his cheek ; his head was burning ; his eyes smarted so that he could not see where he was going ; the dead weight on his arm bore him down, down, as it were into a gulf that was dark and whose fumes were suffocating him : down—down he felt himself going, but he still stumbled on. Then a mighty roar boomed in his ears—he staggered—recovered himself—went on again desperately for a few paces ; staggered once more, then fell prone upon the track : fell with his inanimate burden beneath him, his own broad chest protecting her white bosom ; his

face pressed close to hers, his arms locked in a death-grip around her ; thus he fell to rise no more. Then with a triumphant roar the two fires met and passed over them ; and *they were out of the fire !*

“ But love lives on and has a power to bless,
When they who loved are hidden in the grave.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

A RED CHRISTMAS DAY.

“ In the issues of God's dispensations there can be no permanent ill. He is absolutely good. Of Him are all things, and to Him all things tend. When the good is attained all will be well.”

A. J. PATTERSON, D.D.

Christmas morning dawned hot and dry, with a cloudless sky. The sun rose above the eastern horizon like a great crimson ball, reflecting on its disc the fierce glow of the fires that raged throughout the country. There was not a cloud anywhere on the horizon to veil its naked splendor, or herald its coming with roseate hues of the dawn. All around was a brassy glare that changed to a dull blood red as the orb of day ascended into the higher heavens and caught more directly the full glow of those blazing furnaces beneath. The local nearness of the fires had greatly dispelled the dense, almost impenetrable, clouds of smoke which had for many days hung low over the valley of the Murrumbidgee.

It was late when Edna rose that Christmas morning after her terrible experience of the previous night, and it was much against her mother's wish that she left her room at all. But Edna felt she was needed in that disordered household, most of whom had not been to bed at all. The men were all out with the fire-beaters during that long hot night and were still hard at it striving to turn the threatened danger away from the homestead. It had already devastated many thousands of acres of the squatter's fine pasture lands, so all their exertions were now concentrated upon

making the house, wool-sheds and barns as secure as possible from its fierce onslaught.

At intervals the stockmen, who were out mustering, brought in reports that were by no means cheering. They announced that the fire coming from Mundarloo down the Murrumbidgee toward Wagga Wagga had junctioned with a second big blaze which had been reported to have travelled towards the river, jumping it not far from the ten-mile boundary and on the other side of Forest Glade, where it also had junctioned with another large fire and was now sweeping the district as clean as a billiard table. The settlers were flying before its fury, leaving everything, glad to escape with their lives. Grass, fences, crops, barns, machinery, homesteads, and stock—all went down before it like tinder, and this was the fire that was travelling towards "Cumbooqueepa" Station, which lay right in its track and with a fierce wind blowing it on at a terrible rate. Another report had come in at daybreak stating that a big station near them, situated between Gundagai and Wagga, and in the same district, was also alight. This made the situation for those at "Cumbooqueepa" still more desperate, because it also threatened "Warrimoo," and thus hemmed them in between three fires: two of which had already joined forces. The first, in all its fury, was now approaching right on to the front of the Homestead. But Mr. Esbourne had hopes that the firebreaks and clumps of osage orange and bamboo which he had had planted as a protection to the house would prove effectual in warding off the fire from the homestead.

When Edna was dressed she went out to see what could be done for Mr. Northbrook, and to ask if Nurse Mysia had been found. She learned that there was no word of the young nurse nor of Malpus Brown or Sallust; and that her mother had been with Mr. Northbrook all night, as he was far from well, but had now fallen into a quiet sleep. He was evidently much distressed over the non-appearance of Nurse Mysia. Passing through the lounge, Edna encountered Cyril

Clifford, who had been out helping Frank, and was just coming in to change his clothes, for he was all begrimed with the work in which he had been lending a hand—burning off the grass in the near paddocks to break the progress of the fire. This was all so new to the young English clergyman that he laughed outright when he met Edna, who remarked that he was getting “quite a good specimen of a colonial!”

Cyril had not seen Edna when she arrived from that ordeal of the previous night, and now as he looked upon her burned and blistered face and her singed hair, he impulsively caught her two hands in his own and exclaimed in admiring tones:

“Oh! what a splendid woman you are, Miss Esbourne! How brave! If you are a sample of the women of Australia, then I am proud to know them and call them sisters.”

“Why, it was nothing really, Cyril,” she protested, “nothing but a duty to be done and several lives dependent upon its being done promptly; that was all.”

“Yes, but done in the face of such dangers, and by a woman!” he interposed.

“You would have done the same yourself, Cyril, had you been put to it. You are an Englishman and it is from the old stock that Australians get their grit, you know. The only difference is that the conditions of our country develop our resourcefulness and energy,” she replied.

“I am afraid I should never have been able to face that fire as you did last night,” he contended.

“Halloa! Where are you, Cyril?” cried Frank’s voice outside, and as he entered the lounge he remarked jokingly: “I say, I’m afraid you’ll get no roast turkey and plum pudding for Christmas dinner to-day.”

“Why, do you know I had forgotten it was Christmas Day among all this excitement!” laughed Cyril.

“Yes, all your previous ones have been white, I suppose?” said Edna, smiling.

“Yes, and this one appears to be very red. At all

events, it will be my first experience of a red Christmas Day," Cyril observed.

"Did you know that the fire had crossed the river, Edna?" inquired her brother.

"No, Frank; has it really? Oh! I do hope Nurse Mysia is safe. Did they send anyone to search at the hut, Frank?" she asked anxiously.

"Why, my dear sister, this has swept the ten-mile as clean as a ship's deck. Everything that did not get out of its track has gone down before it," he answered; then seeing that this news caused Edna great distress, he added, "but we will not give up hope yet, for although I hear that none of the men had seen anything of Malpus Brown since yesterday afternoon, it is possible that either he or Sallust has found the nurse and managed to get to a place of safety, even if they could not reach the house before the fire overtook them. Then there's always the river at a pinch, you know," he added, as he moved to the door. Then in a tone of alarm he exclaimed: "Just look here, Cyril—Edna! There's a sight if you like! That's red enough surely—eh, Cyril?"

They looked and simultaneously burst into exclamations of horror and dismay to behold a great mass of fire stretching across their line of vision, twenty miles in extent from the north-eastern boundary and shutting out the whole horizon, while in places it was quite 80 feet in height. The effect upon the Rev. Cyril was enough to stagger him and his pale face turned even paler, while his voice trembled as he managed to articulate—

"Great God! have mercy on us! What an awful sight! Surely this means certain death for us all!"

"No, no, Cyril," objected Edna quickly, in a reassuring voice, as she caught his arm, for she thought he was going to fall, the sight had affected him so. "No, the Father we trust in is a God of goodness and mercy. He will show us a way of escape even at the last moment; we may be put to great extremities, but we shall be saved, of that I feel sure."

"It is like the end of the world as predicted. How can any human being escape from such a fire? Everything must go down before it, surely?" he urged.

"Yes, a great deal will, yet we may pass through it all safely, and with but little loss," affirmed Edna. "But, come! we must all prepare to meet it, you know."

Frank hastened off to join his father again, and Cyril turned to Edna and said, "What about Gracie? Should the house catch alight what could one do with her?"

"I will not be far off, or my father either, should such a disaster overtake us, but we may be spared it even yet. However, should the worst happen and you are left to yourself to act, make for the big dam if you have time, or the green maize crop beyond the orchard if it escapes the flames. Then there is the old well at the foot of the kitchen-garden—oh! of course I forgot, that is impossible for Gracie. However," she pursued, "either father or myself will not be far from you in case of extremity, though I must take Nurse Mysia's place to Mr. Northbrook if danger threatens us."

"Yes, I know," he interposed quickly, "but I really am stronger than I look, and perhaps braver than I have proved myself. You, though, are not too sure of me, Miss Esbourne; you think I'll lose my nerve in a crisis, but perhaps I'll have a chance to recover my lost reputation. This red Christmas may be a red-letter day for me also," he added, with a little laugh and a nod of his head.

Edna's eyes smiled back at him as he turned away, while she paused to look upon the figure of the delicate young curate who had never yet had to face anything in life worse than a tussle in the football field or a spill in the Thames during a boat race; and then thought of what it meant to be burnt out during a bush fire; yet she was convinced that latent power was in the young man—power that testing and stress alone would reveal; so she answered firmly:

"I do trust you, Cyril, and will prove it by leaving her to you in case of danger. I know that you will not fail when you remember that God is your strength and help in time of trouble. But we will hope that it does not quite come to that," she added.

"I trust so, too, but it is as well to be prepared for all emergencies. The story Gracie related of the last big fire you all went through, which left her as she is to-day, has given me some idea of what can be done in extreme cases," Cyril observed.

"Ah! she told you that story, poor little thing," rejoined Edna. "Yes, that was a dreadful night. God save us from another such!" she murmured, and leaving Cyril went to Gracie's room to prepare her for the day. She found Gracie still asleep; she had remained awake late the previous night praying, for she was very anxious about Edna, and had only dropped off towards morning, worn out and weary with the heat and excitement.

Edna felt reluctant to awaken the little sleeper, but it was imperative that Gracie be ready and prepared in case of a hurried removal. Arousing her with a kiss, Edna dressed her, while she told her of the nearness of the fires to their home, and that if there should be any necessity for them to seek refuge from the flames she had asked Cyril to take charge of her, and he had promised. "And, Gracie," she added impressively, "I want you to believe from this moment that when you are in real need of help, *you can help yourself through God* Who is within you and is your Life and Strength. Yes, with His power to sustain you, dear, I feel that you can even *walk alone!* Remember, when you really trust in God fully and wholly, *He never fails you.* He cannot, dare not fail you if you claim His promise just as you would claim mine if I made you one. Call upon Him, dearest, for help and assistance, for strength and power to save yourself from bodily danger, and believe that He can and will do it by enabling you to use your own feet. I am sure that He will do it, if you will but believe

and have faith to try, as Peter did when Jesus, to try his faith, bade him come to Him upon the sea. Gracie, will you promise me that you will make the effort if the opportunity arises ? ” urged Edna earnestly.

“ Oh ! Edna, I should just love to promise if I could only think it were possible,” answered Gracie dubiously.

“ Your own doubt as to its possibility is the only barrier you can erect between God's power to help and the fact of your being helped. He cannot help you if you will not faithfully believe that He can. No more than I could do so except by force if you would not let me try. But God never forces any man. He allows man absolute free will and choice. Now, Gracie, you do believe that I am able and willing to help and save you as I did when you and Molly met with the accident in the last big fire, when the homestead was burnt, do you not ? ” inquired Edna impressively.

“ Yes, oh ! yes, Edna ! Of course I do, you know that,” responded Gracie earnestly.

“ Then just in like manner do I wish you to believe that our Father which art in the heaven of your soul can and will help you to help and save yourself this time, too, if danger and death should threaten our home again, or your life as it did then. Gracie, will you promise to try ? Remember that I have prayed for you constantly and our daily treatments have been as the sowing of the seeds of faith : this will be the fruits thereof.”

“ Yes, Edna, I will, I really will, make a great effort to prove my faith in God's promise if I am put to the test. Somehow I feel I can. But where will you be, Edna ? You will not be away from me, will you ? ” she asked fearfully.

“ No, dear, not if I am able to be near you ; on that you may rely. But, as Mr. Northbrook is so helpless, and we are so short-handed, I must give him all my attention,” replied Edna.

“ Where is Nurse Mysia ? ” interposed Gracie.
“ Can she not look after him, Edna ? ”

"I am sorry to say, dear, that nurse has not been found yet. The shepherds are out looking for her and the men think it more than probable that they have got to some place of safety but are cut off from the homestead by the fires," explained Edna, as she wheeled Gracie's couch into the lounge. When the child's eyes beheld the sight that met them through the door she gave a cry of terror just as Cyril had done, and her face blanched with fear. Edna whispered a few words of loving assurance to her and then went in search of her mother.

From her she learned that things were very serious indeed for them and that it was taking the men all their time to keep the fire down in the lower portions of the big fifty-acre paddock, while several haystacks had caught alight through pieces of burning bark or sticks blown across by the fierce wind that was raging with such fury right upon the front of the homestead. Then together they went to Mr. Northbrook's room to get him ready in case there should be any necessity for another hasty removal.

Roger was awake and fully aware of the impending danger, for the squatter had already been in to see his invalid guest, and tell him how things were going. With the wind in its present quarter, they had every reason to fear the worst; yet they hoped to be able to save the wool-sheds, barns and homestead. The big shearing sheds lower down had been alight twice already and the men were now busy fighting the flames with all their might.

Roger's first question was about the safety of Nurse Mysia. Was she found? Was she safe, did they know? When they made answer in the negative he seemed very much depressed and though assured that the two best men on the run were out looking for her, he did not take comfort nor rally his spirits. He was suffering from the pangs of a keen remorse as well as from the physical effects of his hasty removal and the experiences of that terrible night.

Edna and her mother were then busily engaged in placing everything in readiness should the house fall a prey to the flames. Mrs. Esbourne, with the forethought born of experience, had all her silver ware and plated goods put into a large iron water tank to prevent their melting; while she stored the cellar with every kind of food and drink, so as to save supplies for the hungry ones if the home were burnt. The women had not been long at their tasks before Mr. Esbourne sent word that the fire was upon them. Already it had leaped a five-chain fire-break, and was now careering across the paddocks where the stock were mustered in thousands, and numbers of the unfortunate sheep were roasted alive before they could escape. The men were now cutting down the fences to allow them to run free, and make the best possible shift for themselves. The dams were choked full of the terrified creatures, and many thousands were fleeing in all directions before the oncoming fires, bleating piteously, while the cattle roared frantically with terror.

The efforts to save the shearing sheds and the big wool shed had proved futile. It was impossible for any human creature to stand against that awful heat. To beat back that great wall of fire with such a wind behind it was quite impracticable. So the sheds were left to their fate. All efforts to stay the onrush of the flames in that direction had to be reluctantly abandoned and their energies concentrated upon the preservation of the homestead.

Mr. Esbourne trusted that the precautions he had taken to protect his home since the visitation from the last great fire would in this instance stand him in good stead; and he considered the thick belt of bamboos and the hedge of osage orange would act as an effective barrier to the flames. So with this conviction he devoted all his own energies and the help of his men to other portions of the place which were not so well protected. What then was his consternation when less than an hour later he beheld the whole of that green belt devoured like stubble! All went down before

that greedy destroyer, and the great tongues of flame were leaping across the garden, levelling everything before them and catching even the bush-houses covered with their clustering roses and green creepers—all were enfolded in that blighting embrace. Two well-grown acacias, which had stood between these and the main building, and also an avenue of plane trees, all fell victims to its devastating fury. Then as the flames leaped through their boughs they caught the roof of the lounge, and before the fire-beaters could be summoned to cope with this new source of danger, the fire had burst through its beautiful stained-glass windows and the fanlights in the domed roof, and secured a good hold.

Having caught the open roof, the burning wood fell into the lounge where, with so much furniture of a most inflammable kind, the inside of the dwelling was alight before they were actually aware it was possible. Then all was confusion and bustling excitement. Everyone attempted to secure some of their own personal belongings; the servants rushed hither and thither with bundles of possessions that encumbered their movements, till Edna persuaded them how useless it was to attempt to carry out goods only to be consumed a few yards away from the house, for there was fire, fire! everywhere! Then they obeyed Edna's commands, and made a desperate rush to save their lives instead. Many flocked to the big dams, till these were full of human beings and animals, all mixed up together in a most heterogeneous mass. Some of the beasts were half dead and others drowned.

The squatter's first care was for his injured guest, and with the aid of two of his men and Edna, who secured wet blankets to protect them from the heat, they carried him down through the orchard to a standing maze crop which lay behind it, and being succulently green would be most likely to resist the fire. It was also protected by three acres of orchard: the fine fruit trees which were in full bearing, and which stood between the maize and the fire, would act as an efficient protection to the fugitives. So with a feeling of

security the squatter deposited the helpless Roger in the middle of the green bed of tall growing maize. Edna and several of the servants remained with him, while her father went back to seek his wife and secure the safety of his invalid daughter. He found Mrs. Esbourne working away as bravely as the men, in her desperate endeavors to save their home from complete destruction. She would not at first be persuaded that it was impossible, but cherished some faint hope that they might still be able to snatch the homestead and its contents from the very jaws of the flames. The squatter saw but too plainly that, with such a wind, the odds were against them, and as far as he could see the house was doomed for the second time. He had all he could do to drag his wife out of the burning building; weeping over the prospect of her beautiful home and all its artistic contents falling a prey to the ravages of this terrible foe.

Mrs. Esbourne and Frank were now searching for Cyril and Gracie, whom they missed from the lounge when they returned to the house after seeing Mr. Northbrook safe. They took Mrs. Esbourne down to join the others in the maize crop, and Edna, seeing that Cyril and Gracie were not with them, assured her father and mother that she was certain they were all right, for Cyril had promised to look after Gracie if danger threatened. This did not satisfy the other two and they set off to search for the missing ones, even at the risk of their own lives, for the fire was making all living things seek shelter. The big dam was seen to be out of the question on account of the distance, and Mr. Esbourne was about to return to the house when one of the men told him that he had seen the young clergyman carrying Miss Gracie across the garden long ago. The two then called and "cooeed," but their voices were lost in the din that the terrified animals made, coupled with the roar of the flames.

At this juncture the heat became so terrible and the fire so fierce that they had to seek shelter themselves. All they had time to do was to make for an old disused well, which had a bucket and windlass that

had been used for drawing water for the stock in the early days before the new dams were built. A plank platform had been erected half way down with a pump attached to allow of the water being pumped up to the bucket when the well was low, as, owing to the long drought, was now the case. The pump had long since been removed, but the pipe, however, remained attached to the plank and touched the water quite twenty feet below. A ladder was suspended from the brink down to this platform and a trap-door permitted of a man's body passing down the ladder to the plank.

When Mr. Esbourne and Frank reached the well and were about to clamber down to escape the fire, what was their surprise to find that the well was already occupied!

"Father!" exclaimed Frank, in amazement, as he scrambled down the rather rickety ladder, "why, it's Cyril with Gracie!"

"Impossible! What! you don't mean to tell me that Gracie is down there?" ejaculated the squatter, peering into the gloomy depths of the old well, his eyes not yet having become accustomed to the darkness after the fierce blaze of the fires above. But soon he distinguished his invalid daughter Gracie, (who had never sat up for nearly thirteen years) actually reclining on the mid-platform of the well, with the Rev. Cyril Clifford supporting her in his arms; and neither of them apparently much the worse for the unusual exertion of getting there. Reaching the platform himself, he beheld Gracie leaning against Cyril and smiling serenely at their very evident astonishment, while he asked in wonderment—

"In heaven's name, my child, how did you get here?"

"Why, father, Cyril carried me part of the way and I —— Father! father," she cried, catching his hand and in her excitement drawing him down beside her, "dearest father, what do you think? Guess!"

"What do I think, my darling? Why, only that

I am for ever grateful to Cyril that he has got you here safely. Frank and I have looked everywhere for you, but we should not have thought of searching *here*. Whoever suggested this place to you? We only —"

"Hush! father, hush! Never mind anything else," interrupted Gracie eagerly. "Listen till I tell you the best part of all—the only part worth listening to, you'll say it's *such* good news."

"Well, dear, I'm listening. What is it? Out with it quickly, for good news seems scarce these days," he remarked glumly.

"Father, *I walked* some of the way here!" asserted Gracie, most impressively.

"*You walked*? Impossible! You must be dreaming, Gracie!" cried her father and brother incredulously.

"No, she is not. I can answer for the fact myself!" interposed Cyril Clifford in very grave and earnest tones, and glancing up at the squatter with a countenance that told them he had met with a problem which he found it difficult at that moment to solve.

"*You know she walked*!" echoed Frank.

"Yes, I can indeed vouch for the truth of Gracie's statement," asserted the young clergyman. "I assure you both that with my own eyes I beheld her walk the last few steps to this well and that, too, unaided by me," he affirmed positively.

"How in God's name did she do it, Cyril?" cried Mr. Esbourne, his voice trembling with excitement. "Tell me all about it."

"It's true, father—it's quite true," insisted Gracie as she nestled against him while he helped Cyril to support her frail little form on the platform.

"I do not quite know how it happened, sir," Cyril said, in grave and quiet tones, "I only know that I was carrying her and all at once she slipped out of my arms in some mysterious way, for I am certain I did not let her fall. The next thing I knew she was running on in front of me like the very spirit of herself. Really, to confess the truth, for the moment I was uncertain

whether she had not collapsed in my arms and that it was her spirit—the ghost of Gracie—that I was beholding. Then all of a sudden she swayed and tottered and possibly would have fallen had I not caught her and lifted her off her feet. Then I was not too sure as to whether the thing had happened or I had imagined it.

“But, Cyril, it *was* true. You know now it was *really* true,” interrupted Gracie.

“Yes, I do. I know now that it was a positive material fact—or perhaps I should say a miracle—which I beheld,” asserted the young curate gravely. Cyril’s voice and manner were sufficient in themselves to convince them that he knew and believed what he was saying to be perfectly true. As this conviction was borne upon Mr. Esbourne’s mind, a great wave of joy and gratitude swept over him, a lump rose in his throat that seemed to choke his utterance. Then he bent over his young daughter and clasped her close to his breast in a long clinging embrace, while he whispered hoarsely :

“Thank God for this greatest of all His gifts. If we have lost everything else in the shape of home and worldly goods this Christmas Day, yet I would gladly yield up everything over again and thank Him for this rich and precious Christmas gift—your restoration to even partial health, my daughter !”

“Amen,” echoed Cyril reverently.

“This is just the miracle of miracles—that Gracie can walk !” remarked Frank, in awed tones.

“Yes, it is that. Just a modern miracle I consider it,” assented Cyril.

“It is indeed very wonderful and I am quite at a loss to account for it in the face of all that the doctors have said. Really, it will seem as if nothing could be impossible after this !” observed the squatter, shaking his head musingly.

“It is as wonderful as the story of Peter walking on the sea. I often wonder how he did it,” remarked Frank.

"It was not so wonderful when he was in the presence of the Son of God," said the young clergyman reverently, "but then you know he soon began to sink; and, as Jesus said, it was owing to his lack of faith."

"Yes, and that was just like myself, Cyril, when I began to fall and you had to catch me and lift me into your arms again," said Gracie. "I know now why I could not keep on my feet all the way: I was just like Peter, I walked in perfect faith and trust at first, then all at once I thought how wonderful it was that I *was* walking—actually *walking by myself*—that I *could* walk! Then it was I began to totter and Cyril had to catch me. That was just like Peter, for I also took my eyes off the Son of God and got fearful and soon began, like poor Peter, to sink."

"You have not told us how it all happened yet," said her father.

"Oh! father, dear, it was just God Himself in me who did this wonderful thing," whispered Gracie, nestling closer to his breast. "Edna said when she was dressing me this morning that if I were in any danger and would only believe implicitly that I could walk, that God would help me to do so. That He would give me the power to walk on my own feet and not have to use anyone's arms. And, father, isn't it just wonderful, for I did trust Him. I did believe that He could and, just as Jesus said, He did not fail me, any more than you would have done, because I had faith in His promise. Only fancy, father, how grand it is! How glorious! To think that after thirteen years I should be able to walk even a few steps alone. Oh! it is too good to be really true!" and the child was so overcome with joy and the consequent excitement she had undergone with the severe mental and physical strain, that she laid her curly head against her father's breast and wept unrestrainedly.

Her father allowed the tears to have their vent and just sat silently waiting till the storm had spent itself. There was a silence of several minutes, broken only by

the sound of Gracie's weeping and the dull roar of the fire overhead. Presently Frank said :

"Cheer, up, Gracie! don't cry any more; this is the last Christmas that you'll be spending like this. We _____"

"Well, I sincerely trust there will never be another like it for her, or for any of us," interjected Cyril.

Frank laughed and added, "Oh! of course, I meant that she'd be able to walk like the rest of us by that time. Gracie, when you get up on top again we'll give you a chance of proving your faith."

"I'll be able to do it. I'm sure I shall now that I have taken those first few steps," she answered, lifting her tear-stained face from her father's arms.

"Of course you will," cried Frank, anxious to cheer her, "there's not the least reason why you shouldn't, as far as we can see."

"Now I know that it is possible, and that it will be only a little while till I can get accustomed to using these neglected limbs of mine that have been in bondage so long; then I'll walk as well, and be as strong as you and Cyril are."

Both young men laughed at the idea of that frail young girl ever getting the same vigor of limb as they boasted of. But Gracie continued with a reassuring nod of her head—

"Well, I am sure now that I have made up my mind I can, that it will be so. Edna says a child of God has no right to express sickness, weakness or disease, because our Father in Heaven is none of these: nothing but perfect health is our inheritance and I am determined that I shall have nothing less than my full and complete rights as God's daughter." This last assertion was given very emphatically, to which her father made answer—

"I pray God that your words may be realized, my darling. Yet, really after what you state has already taken place we would be justified in hoping for anything however wonderful, even miracles."

"We should indeed, Mr. Esbourne, for this proves

to us that with the Lord all things are possible," ventured Cyril, impressively. The young clergyman was deeply stirred by the awfulness of the catastrophe which had overtaken them all, and now at the more recent and most miraculous thing that had come to pass before his own eyes ; thus proving to him that God was dealing with them in His own peculiar way ; and his soul was uplifted and strengthened by this gracious revelation of God's power and His very present help in time of trouble or disaster.

Just then a loud and sustained " cooe " was heard, which Frank announced was the voice of the overseer Hanson, calling to the men and rallying them from their places of refuge. This was a sign that the worst of the fire had passed over. Speedily Mr. Esbourne and Frank scrambled up the ladder to the top, bidding Cyril remain with Gracie till they could come and help them out or find a place to put her when he had reconnoitered and reported how things were above ground.

Hastening to the corn-field, where the rest of the family had taken refuge, the squatter was rejoiced to find that it was quite intact and the refugees safe and well, except that they had got a good smoking and experienced a particularly hot time while the fire was passing over them. The orchard had protected them and the fire had but skirted the edge of the field, where they lay hidden amongst the succulent green stalks of growing maize. It was with grateful hearts that Mrs. Esbourne and Edna heard the voices of father and son calling to learn if they were all right. As they had failed to return to the field with Cyril and Gracie, the mother spent those anxious hours in mental torment ; but Edna had learned to be " still and know that He doeth all things well," therefore she just waited in faith and prayer till the news came.

And oh ! what grand news it was to her faithful, trusting heart ; how she praised and thanked her God for all His good gifts, most especially this last one of her little sister's partial restoration to strength. Then,

best of all, it had been a grand test of Gracie's faith, and how splendidly the child had risen to it!

When Mrs. Esbourne heard the wonderful intelligence from her husband and son, she for the time forgot all her other troubles, exclaiming eagerly—

"Do let us go and see Gracie, George! I must see this miracle for myself before I can believe it."

"Mother, dear, don't be a 'doubting Thomas,' " cried Edna. "Very likely Gracie will be so exhausted by her first effort that you will only see a very limp little creature emerge from the well."

"Oh! I don't mind, only that I know she is safe and well," asserted her mother, in eager excited tones.

"My dear, the ground is too hot, I fear, for you to walk on yet," protested her husband.

"We do not mind the heat, George, after what we have all passed through. We are glad to have escaped with our lives," she said.

"How are you, Mr. Northbrook?" asked the squatter, coming into the centre, where Roger lay covered with wet blankets. "I am afraid this has been a trying time for you?"

"Oh! please, do not worry about me, sir; I am only sorry I am a burden at this trying time rather than a help to you all," replied Roger, his voice coming from beneath the enveloping wraps thick and muffled. "This is good news you have brought us, but you do not say if the house is saved?"

"No, all gone, everything a heap of ruins!" answered the squatter laconically. "Another of the hardships we Australian squatters have to face and overcome," he added, as he turned away.

"A very bitter one, too, I consider," observed Roger, then he asked anxiously: "Have they heard anything of Nurse Mysia yet?"

Mr. Esbourne shook his head and replied, "No, not any of the men have been able to get near us for these last ten hours. But news may come in now at any minute. I'll let you know at once. I must leave

you here a while longer till arrangements can be made for our removal elsewhere. You'll be all right, I hope."

"Yes, yes, do not let yourself be anxious about me, I beg," replied Roger. "It is my one regret that I cannot help you all."

Mr. Esbourne then joined his wife and son, who, with Edna, were now half way across the orchard, eager to see Gracie. As they came in sight of the spot where the fine homestead had stood embowered in greenery, they could not suppress a pang of pain and expressions of deep regret at the sight which now met their eyes. There was nothing left but a gaunt and bare looking block of charred and smoking ruins, where once had stood that picturesque Australian homestead.

Mrs. Esbourne tried not to look at the wreck of her lovely home, and turned her head away; but the tears would spring to her eyes and her husband knew well what it cost her to gaze upon the remnants of years of effort and toil. Placing his arm around her as they walked through the desolated garden towards the old well, he said gently, "Never mind, my dear, I know it is bad, just as bad as it can be for you—but remember the compensation we have as a consolation. The fact that through this disaster our once crippled Gracie has again used her feet."

"Yes, yes, George, I know—I am grateful," she sobbed, "but it is hard and cruel to see the home I have taken such pride in left like that: I shall have no heart to begin all over again."

"Oh! yes, you will, my dear," he replied reassuringly. "You must remember that we are well insured and our loss is nothing as compared with hundreds of others whom this fire has left homeless and penniless, too."

Just then they reached the old well and here they found that Frank was busy assisting Gracie and Cyril out.

"Hold, on, my boy! Wait a moment, you'll hurt her like that," cried his father, hurrying to the spot.

"No, it's all right father. Cyril's got her and she's safe," returned Frank cheerily.

True enough she was, for as they came to the spot Cyril's head was just emerging from the mouth of the well and on his shoulder when it appeared above the surface Gracie's pale sweet face reposed contentedly. Frank was turning away at the windlass with all his might; and as he hauled, the forms of the two fire-prisoners simultaneously hove in sight above the brink. Thus they made their exit from the lower regions, where they had been imprisoned for several hours. Even the anxious mother could not refrain from smiling at the peculiar figure the two cut as they put in an appearance; while the squatter exclaimed as he went forward to receive Gracie from Cyril's arms:

"By jove! my boy, that was well done. I didn't think it was in you. I had no idea that you had so much nerve, let alone the muscle to stand a strain like that. I'm proud of you, indeed I am, Cyril, and thank you from my heart."

This praise from Mr. Esbourne was good, and as the young man relinquished his precious burden into her father's arms, he blushed like a girl as he said:

"Oh! it was nothing, sir, really nothing. I am glad it was my privilege to help her." Then his eyes met Edna's and he knew he was understood and fully appreciated, which was more than thanks.

"Oh! we get plenty of testing at college, dad," cried Frank, eager to put his friend at his ease. "I know the heat here has tried Cyril of late, but you don't know what he's capable of; and a fellow never knows what he can do till he's put to it."

Gracie was received with warm embraces from her mother and Edna, coupled with exclamations and questions if it was really a fact that she had walked a few paces. But to all this the poor child was just then incapable of returning any answer. She was too exhausted by her long fast and the nervous strain and physical exertion she had undergone that day; and could only reply with a faint smile, a little sigh, and

then she sank limp into her father's arms. She was carried down to the spot where Mr. Northbrook was and there laid on rugs till some place could be prepared for their reception. Edna now had the two invalids under her charge while her parents went to inspect the damage to their home and direct the men in recovering some food from the cellar, where Mrs. Esbourne had stored it in case of disaster such as this which had overtaken them.

In the middle of their impromptu meal—the first they had partaken of that day—a buggy drove up with Mr. Mostyn and his son Bertram. They had come over from Warrimoo when they had heard of the threatened danger at “Cumbooquepa,” for the wind that had driven the fire in their direction had been the means of saving Mr. Mostyn's homestead; though he had lost several thousands of acres of grass, miles of fencing and about a thousand head of stock. Immediately they knew of the probable danger that the Esbournes were in, Mr. Mostyn had set out to give his old friend a helping hand and what assistance lay in his power.

It appeared that they had started quite early in the day, after the fire had been quenched on their own estate, but they were cut off by the flames several times and it was only by taking a very circuitous route that they had been able to reach there even then. The country was in such an awful state, announced Mr. Mostyn: it was quite impossible to describe it; and, unfortunately, they had to relate that hundreds were in a similar plight to the Esbournes, and the township of Wagga Wagga was full to overflowing with refugees from all parts of the district. There was not a bed nor shelter to be had for love or money. Tents had been erected and families were huddling together anywhere they could get a shelter.

Mr. Mostyn insisted upon the whole family returning with him that night to Warrimoo, and it was with very grateful hearts that they accepted this neighborly hospitality.

As the two pastoralists stood on the rise near the big wool-shed (which, strangely enough had escaped total destruction, being only charred and blackened outside) it was a changed prospect that met their view. Devastation and desolation were everywhere visible. Before them, from the vantage point where they had paused in their tour of inspection, the eye ranged over miles of country which presented a burnt and blackened trail over which the fires had passed. This desolate looking wilderness stretched back from what had once been the road, bounded by fences, over thousands of acres of pasture lands on which not a vestige of herbage remained—indeed not so much as would feed a rabbit on a hundred acres—where once those beautiful grassed paddocks grew feed as high as a beast, and were such as would delight the eye and heart of any grazier.

Now, bare and unprotected by any fences, they stretched for many miles, only a few charred posts indicating where the boundaries once were. A giant tar-brush might have given the whole district its color ; or if it was possible for black snow to fall the effect might have been the same ; not even a reaping machine could have shaved those paddocks as clean as they then were of grass or herbage of any kind.

In this particular portion of the Riverina there is not a great quantity of green timber, though here and there an uncleared paddock or stretch of wooded country covering several miles may be seen ; and here it was that the shrivelled gum trees and odorous eucalyptus added to the picture of weird desolation. Some of these trees were still blazing, though it was several hours since the main body of the fire had swept over them. They stood in that desolate waste like beacons on a barren coast, flaring away brightly at their summits, while their massive lower trunks were smouldering like small furnaces ; and unless the much-needed rains came in time to extinguish them, these forest giants would fall and lie prostrate, to become mere burnt logs or heaps of charcoal.

Added to the depressing aspect of the scene on

which the two friends gazed, their nostrils were offended by the odor of burning flesh, for thousands of the unfortunate sheep and cattle and pigs had been overtaken by the flames and perished where they stood. In the paddocks beyond the homestead, hundreds of carcasses lay ; some completely burnt till nothing but the skulls remained with the skeletons charred and distorted ; while others were still alive but suffering terrible agonies, so that the station hands were already busy putting them out of their pain by a merciful death. Many others had their wool completely singed off their backs as clean as though they had been freshly shorn, and these still tore about the bare paddocks in the deepest distress, their hoofs also being fearfully burnt, as there was no spot where they could find relief. Numbers of such were totally crippled. The loss among the stock was as yet incalculable, seeing they had been turned loose when the fire came upon them, and were now running free over the country with other flocks from neighboring stations, most of which had undergone a similar experience. There would have to be a great mustering day when all was over.

The two old friends remarked upon the disastrous visitation which they had passed through, but in this instance Mr. Esbourne's losses were admittedly heavier than many of his class. Yet they consoled each other that their losses were only relative, as there were hundreds less able to stand theirs, and numbers who had been totally ruined by this last outbreak ; therefore, it was their duty to show fortitude in their own trouble and pity and practical sympathy for those whose distress was greater. Certainly these two old Australian pioneers recognised the truth of the lines—

“ ——— Two things stand like stone,
Kindness in another's trouble, courage in your own.”

Thus closed this memorable Christmas Day to all at “Cumbooquepa,” and though it had dawned in tragedy and ended in a night of gloom to many, yet like all the experiences of our lives, it was fraught with

happiness as well as sorrow ; with its joy was mingled pain ; there was sunshine as well as shadow and storm ; till, when viewed from a distance in later years, it was seen to be but the closing scene in one act, which was the opening to another—a brighter and fairer one.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TANGLED LIFE LINES.

“ There is no sort of wrong deed of which a man can bear the punishment alone ; you can’t isolate yourself and say that the evil which is in you shall not spread. Men’s lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe ; evil spreads as necessarily as disease.” —GEORGE ELIOT.

The family from “ Cumbooquepa ” were all warmly welcomed at Warrimoo, where they were made as comfortable as circumstances would permit, and the two invalids taken good care of, since both Roger Northbrook and Gracie Esbourne were feeling the reaction of the recent shock and severe strain through which they had passed.

Greatly to the relief of all in that fire-stricken district, heavy showers of rain fell at midnight, which cooled the heated air and quenched the still smouldering logs. The rain brought much-needed relief in every way, and, above all, cleared the atmosphere of that heavy pall of smoke and dense haze that had so long hung over the district, blotting out everything on the landscape till it was never a certainty that another fresh outbreak might not occur at any time. The rain, however, effectually dispelled all such fears and the stricken settlers had heart to set to work to ascertain the extent of their damage and to begin to gather together the remnants of their ruined homes : ready once more, with the indomitable courage of the colonial pioneers, to “ try again.” None but those who have passed through such an awful ordeal can realize the intense relief and deep gratitude with which that rainfall was welcomed, and tears of joy sprang to many eyes when the first drops fell and increased in force till they became a steady downpour.

Edna Esbourne had risen and was dressed early that morning, as her anxiety about Nurse Mysia had prevented her sleeping. She was at the bedroom window looking out at the welcome rain when, hearing voices, she turned in that direction and noticed Sallust standing in the yard with a group of men around him. Hastening out of doors, she joined them. As they saw her approach, the men parted to make way for her, and stepping into the centre beside her father she exclaimed eagerly :

" Oh ! Sallust, you have returned ! Where is she ? Did you find her ? " and Edna looked round anxiously as she spoke, but the grave countenances of the men struck a cold chill to her heart. " Sallust, tell me, is she safe ? " urged Edna, looking towards the man.

But he only raised his great sheepish eyes to the face of his young mistress and made an attempt to speak, then covered his burnt face (scorched by the fierce heat of the fire and blistered by the water when he sought refuge in the river) with his grimy hands ; then burst into tears and sobbed like a woman. The man was exhausted from hunger, and overwrought, and now the disappointment of having failed to save Nurse Mysia quite unmanned the poor fellow.

Mr. Mostyn and her father then led Edna away out of hearing of the men and the latter turned to his daughter, saying gravely—

" My dear Edna, Sallust has just brought us the sad intelligence that he has found Nurse Grayson and Malpus Brown ! Both have evidently been overtaken by the fires, not above a quarter-mile from the hut on the ten-mile. Both lives have been sacrificed, but to all appearances the shepherd has given his life in an unselfish endeavor to save the poor young nurse. I really never thought there was so much humanity in the fellow, and I'm pretty certain no one else on the station did either. It's a lesson to me not to judge a man by appearances. Poor fellow ! Poor girl ! " concluded the squatter, with a catch in his breath, for he keenly felt this latter disaster which had befallen

them. He had suffered heavily from loss of stock and property, but the loss of these two lives was worse than all.

Edna had listened to this awful news without a word of comment, only that her face went if possible a trifle paler and her breath came in quick short gasps for a moment or two ; but otherwise she evinced no sign of the deep emotions that were stirring within her.

"We have told you this now, Edna, because we feel that you can be brave and help us hide this latter tragedy from mother and Gracie : they have both had quite enough to bear lately ; this can be put off for a few hours at any rate," remarked her father.

"Yes, father, I know," replied Edna, in a calm voice, "but Mr. Northbrook ? He must know ; the news will have to be broken to him, and he will take it very badly I am afraid. He is most concerned about Nurse Mysia, and indeed has scarcely spoken about anything else since she was known to be missing. Who will tell him, father ? "

"I think you had better leave that task to me, George," interposed Mr. Mostyn. "A stranger like myself can do these things better, I fancy, in a case like this."

"Yes, perhaps you're right, Fred," assented Mr. Esbourne, "but surely there will be no necessity to say anything till the bodies are brought in. We must see to that at once."

"Leave me to give all instructions, I'll send several of my men off in the waggon at once," volunteered Mr. Mostyn, turning away to give his orders, while Edna returned to the house.

As she entered the dining room, where the other members of the family were gathered, Mrs. Esbourne, seated by a couch which had been fixed up with pillows to accommodate Gracie, was relating with pardonable pride the terrible experience through which Edna had passed on Christmas Eve, when bringing Mr. Northbrook from the hut to the homestead. As

Edna came in her mother looked up quickly, saying anxiously :

"How do you feel this morning, Edna, my dear? You are looking very worn-out. I am afraid you have not slept. Gracie also is feeling the reaction."

"No wonder, indeed, after all you have been through!" interjected Mrs. Mostyn, sympathetically. "It's a wonder you are alive. How are you, Edna?" she added, coming forward and kissing her cheek.

"Thank you! I am quite well," returned Edna, looking anxiously at her little sister, whose pale tired face showed the effects of the unusual strain she had undergone. When she had given her mother and Gracie their morning greeting, Edna said inquiringly—

"How is Mr. Northbrook? Have you seen him this morning, mother?"

"Yes, my dear. I was in with him a little while ago. He certainly is far from well, but bears up splendidly. He is worrying very greatly about the non-appearance of Nurse. Isn't it a wonder there is no news about her? We're expecting it every minute now, and I hope she is safe," answered Mrs. Esbourne.

"Oh! yes, it is pretty certain to be so. The men who have gone to look for her will see that she is taken to a place of refuge till the fires are over, you may rest easy about that," affirmed Mrs. Mostyn reassuringly.

"Well, I hope so, too, for though Frank is just going to send off a telegram to ask Dr. Foreland to come up and superintend the removal of Mr. Northbrook to Sydney to-morrow, I am certain he will not be willing to go till he hears some definite news regarding Nurse Mysia," stated Mrs. Esbourne.

"Has the telegram been sent yet, mother?" asked Edna quickly, thinking how she could manage to see that the news of the young nurse's death could be sent also, without her mother knowing it; so, leaving the room hastily, she sought her father, who promised to attend to the matter himself at once.

About noon the wagon arrived at Warrimoo

bearing the bodies of the two victims of the fire. Then it was impossible to keep the sad news from the other members of the family and there was deep gloom over the whole household when they learned of this latest tragedy. Mr. Northbrook was asleep and was therefore the last to learn of the fate of the woman he had loved. Edna found her father alone, and asked in eager subdued tones :

"Where are they, father?"

"We have ordered the large barn to be cleared and the men have laid them there pending the inquest, which will have to be held at once," replied her father.

"It is a very dreadful sight," said Mr. Mostyn as he joined them while they were speaking.

"I want to see them, father! I must see the body of the man and the young nurse!" demanded Edna quietly.

"My dear girl, impossible! The sight is too painful for you! They have been so terribly burned. Wait till they have been given proper attention and are confined," protested her father.

"You know I am brave enough to stand almost anything, father. I have a reason for wishing to see the two bodies before they are disturbed," Edna insisted, catching her father's arm and drawing him with her towards the barn.

"But, Edna, the sight will distress you greatly; it is far better that you should not look upon it," observed Mr. Mostyn.

"No, I think I can stand it, Mr. Mostyn. From something that Mr. Northbrook said when he was partly conscious, I want to convince myself that all is right. You say the shepherd Malpus Brown has the nurse tightly clasped in his arms?" she queried.

"Yes, the noble fellow evidently made a desperate effort to save the poor girl and died with her. It appears from what the men who brought them in tell us of the position of the bodies when found, that the man must have been carrying her and fallen when the fire overtook them. Her face was covered by his

shoulder, and so the upper portion of her body was shielded from the worst ravages of the fire. His was face downwards, so that the features of both have been protected and are recognisable, but otherwise they are terribly disfigured, so much so that I really would not care for you to look upon them, my dear," objected her father.

"Then let the men cover the two figures, and take me to look at their faces," persisted Edna with unusual determination.

He knew that it was not morbid curiosity, for that was not a characteristic of Edna's; so he concluded she must have some good reason for her persistence, and observed:

"It is not like you, Edna, to want to look upon gruesome sights; I cannot understand this exception!"

"Trust me, father," she replied, "I have a very good reason for asking, as I shall explain when I have seen the bodies."

"Well, I know you never do anything for mere caprice, so come along. You'll accompany us, Fred?" he said, turning to Mr. Mostyn, who replied: "Yes, if you wish it," and together they entered the doors of the big barn, which were closed behind them, and the three stood bareheaded in the gloomy building, alone with the dead.

As Edna glanced round the barn she saw in the centre a door set on trestles, on which something lay shrouded with a white sheet. Steeling her nerves for what she might behold, she walked firmly to the spot and stood by the side of the temporary bier, on which those two forms lay still locked in a close embrace. Mr. Esbourne quietly removed the cloth from the faces of the dead, revealing them to Edna's view.

For a few seconds, Edna gazed intently at the features of Nurse Mysia, still pretty and not even distorted by that awful death; then she slowly turned her eyes upon the face of the man known to them all as Malpus Brown. Suddenly her face changed, she

started violently, then bent forward and peered more closely at him, while her hand trembled as she pulled the covering lower down to reveal the face more clearly then she said in a voice that was tense and strained.

"It is, yes, it is! Father, don't you know who this is?"

"Yes, my child, I know it is Malpus Brown, our poor shepherd," he answered in a subdued voice.

"Father, then you don't recognise him? You did not know that *this is Eugene Vernon*, my ——" she faltered.

"Impossible!" ejaculated Mr. Esbourne, while both gentlemen pressed forward to get a closer look at the man's face.

"It is, father. This is the body of Reginald Eugene Vernon, of that I am sure," she answered in an unsteady voice.

"You can not have made a mistake, Edna?" suggested Mr. Mostyn. "You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure—positive. I know that is the man who was—was ——" she faltered again, "was my husband."

"My poor girl! can it be that you are correct?" exclaimed her father, coming over to her side and placing his arm around Edna's shoulders, fearing the results of this shock upon her nerves.

"Father, dear, I would know him among a thousand. There never was but one Eugene Vernon in the world for me—there never could be another," asserted Edna in strangely calm tones.

"This seems almost incredible," said the squatter, in a puzzled manner, as he more closely examined the face of the dead man. "He was surely much changed, that is before his hair was burnt off, that he could be on the run and none of us recognise him."

"Did you ever see him yourself, Edna?" asked Mr. Mostyn.

"No. I had heard about him, but never remember coming in contact with the stock-rider they called 'Malpus Brown,'" she replied.

"He had not been on the station long," announced Mr. Esbourne. "I hardly remember seeing him myself, he was such a morose and exclusive character, I heard. It was Len. who engaged him while I was abroad." Then he added, "Whatever could have brought him here, if it really be Vernon?"

"Father," interposed Edna, "if you have the least doubt about the identity of this man, I will prove it to you that I am right. Now, if you will open the front of his shirt, and there" (pointing with her finger to the spot she indicated), "there, just over his heart you will find a large red cross pricked into the skin in Indian ink, and underneath it some letters. They are his own initials, 'R.E.V.,' and beneath them is a very small dagger. He had them done by an Indian camel driver on the Western Australian goldfields, and when I asked him what it meant he told me it was 'his brand of Cain.' He would never tell me what the dagger meant, but said it was just a fancy device. But, father, if those letters with the red cross and dagger are there on that dead man's breast—which I am positive they are—then you will know I am right and that he is not Malpus Brown, but Reginald Eugene Vernon."

While she had been speaking, Mr. Mostyn had gently opened the remnants of what had been two shirts: a cotton one with a flannel one underneath. The breast portions of these had escaped destruction through being pressed closely against the bosom of the woman whose form he held so tightly in his arms. Indeed, it was difficult to separate them sufficiently for the two men to disclose the spot Edna had indicated, for their arms had become rigid. Edna turned away while this operation was proceeding, and the emotions that surged through her heart in those few seconds contained the history of a lifetime to the woman. The voice of her father recalled her and she turned to the bier as he exclaimed in hoarse accents:

"You are right, Edna, it is as you stated, the cross is here."

For some moments they stood gazing at the strange device, then Edna said quietly :

" You are satisfied now, father, are you not ? "

" Yes, yes, I am—I must be ! Yet I am afraid, if I spoke the truth, I am not sorry, though one can scarcely be glad over such an awfully sudden ending to a human life, be it ever so evil, especially when he was doing what appears to be the first unselfish action of his unhappy life," observed Mr. Esbourne.

" Father, dear, I think you are quite right to be glad, as that very action has been his atonement. Besides, Eugene Vernon is not dead, but merely passed into one of the many mansions of the Soul—the Father's house, where he shall have a better and grander opportunity of developing the great qualities of mind and heart which he so unwisely wasted, while here, wasted like the prodigal, in riotous living and in a strange country. I praise and thank our God for His great mercy to this his once erring son. Now I know that I have seen of the travail of my soul and been satisfied ; my prayers are answered this day, since he—the wanderer—is safe home at last in the new house of his soul."

Edna had spoken quietly, tenderly, and with so much reverence that both her listeners were visibly affected, knowing as they did what this ordeal was costing the woman before them. Mr. Mostyn, to cover his confusion in the presence of the others over such a revelation as had just been made to them all, began to fumble with the coverings of the bodies, when suddenly his hand touched something hard just below the breast-bone of the man's body, and feeling to ascertain what it was, discovered a broad leather belt which bulged in parts like pockets. An exclamation of surprise escaped him as he drew Mr. Esbourne's attention to it, and they at once decided that as it might contain private papers of a nature not to be handled or examined by the attendants, it would be advisable to remove it and inspect its contents indoors ; more especially knowing, as they did, the true identity

of the wearer and his close connection with the family at "Cumbooqueepa." Therefore they agreed to remove the belt, but as this operation would necessitate the exposure of the lower parts of the bodies of the poor burned victims, Mr. Esbourne did not wish Edna to be further distressed by such a sight, and he offered to walk back to the house with her first.

"No, thank you, father, I would rather go myself, so that I may slip indoors without seeing any of the others just now." She then turned and was passing by the head of the impromptu bier, when she paused to take another look at the still faces that lay there side by side in death's cold embrace. For a moment her bosom heaved and her lips quivered as she placed her fingers upon the brow of him whom she had once called by the dear name of "husband," saying, in accents that were low, and tender with an infinite pity:

"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us, and deliver us from evil for Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory, for ever." "Amen!" "Amen!" echoed the two listeners reverently. Then she added, "Eugene Vernon, now by the love I bear all souls I can truthfully say I have long ago forgiven you, as I would be forgiven, and as our Heavenly Father has already forgiven you. Take my blessing with you on your new soul-journey, and may God's Peace and Love enfold you unto the end."

Then she turned to the other silent sleeper and laid a kiss upon that white brow—the brow of Mysia Grayson, whom she did not then know was his wife—saying in a voice that quivered with her pent-up emotions, "Good-night, little sister in Christ's Love, when we meet again it will be good-morning! Peace! Peace!"

Covering her eyes with her handkerchief to hide her tears, Edna turned away from the two sleepers and crossed the room to the door, which her father opened for her, and silently she passed out. Crossing the yard with hasty steps, she sought her room, where she could in silent meditation seek and find the Peace

that would soothe all her earthly woes—the Peace of God!—that ever present solace to the trusting seeking soul!

“What! what! Mr. Northbrook! This is too venturesome I fear. You really ought to lie still to-day and not attempt to get up. You’ve had enough knocking about lately, I fancy!” exclaimed Mr. Esbourne as he and Mr. Mostyn entered Roger’s room to find him attempting to get dressed, with Frank and Cyril acting as valets.

“Yes, indeed,” echoed Mr. Mostyn, “I consider you are unwise to risk being a cripple for life with a fracture like that. Better wait till Dr. Foreland arrives before you move it much more.”

“I really cannot say I feel any ill-effects from the moving of my leg,” answered Roger, “though I admit to being a bit knocked up, chiefly through the long spell of inactivity I have had. But for the unusual weight of it I am scarcely conscious I possess this fractured limb.” He laughed with a forced cheerfulness, then said eagerly and in a voice that was agitated in spite of the effort to hide his feelings, “How are things with you all? Have you received any news of Nurse Mysia yet?”

“Yes, there is news,” assented Mr. Esbourne.

“What? She is found?” he cried, then added, “No, it is not good news, I see it in your faces. Don’t spare me, tell me plainly, only relieve my anxiety at once,” he urged, raising himself on his elbow in the bed.

“She has been found, and the stock-rider Malpus Brown also,” said Mr. Mostyn, gravely.

“She is found? Then she is safe?” interjected Roger.

“She is dead! She and the man were overtaken by the fire, both burned ——” But Roger did not wait till Mr. Mostyn finished:

“Dead! Mysia *dead*! Oh! God, God! it is too awful!” he cried bitterly as, with a deep groan, he buried his face in the pillow, while the other four

bowed their heads in respect for the man's very evident grief at the sorrowful news. There was silence in the room for a few seconds. No one seemed able to break it by attempting to utter words of consolation, for all were much affected, till a voice said very softly but in quavering tones at first, that grew stronger towards the closing sentence :

"I am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live ; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord. Amen."

The voice was that of the young clergyman, and as the "Amen " fell from his lips it was echoed reverently by each man in that room : even the stricken Roger was soothed by the promise breathed.

Cyril and Frank then quietly withdrew, leaving the two elders to impart the details of the tragedy to Roger, who had now rallied his nerves and regained his usual composure. When Mr. Esbourne and Mr. Mostyn were seated he asked :

"Tell me all about it ? What of the man known as Malpus Brown ? Has he also perished in the fire ? "

"Yes, the two lives have been sacrificed. Yet he, poor fellow, might have saved himself, I think, only that he evidently gave his life in the effort to save the young nurse." Mr. Esbourne then briefly related the whole circumstances of the discovery of the bodies of the two victims, and the manner in which they were found.

Roger listened to his account with intense interest, making no comment till the squatter ended by observing : "This self-sacrifice on the part of the man has taught me a lesson never to judge even the worst of my kind. It is very evident the milk of human kindness flows in everyone's breast, and is expressed at times when we least expect it."

"Have you no other particulars regarding this man, though ? " asked Roger quietly, as he watched Mr. Esbourne's face closely.

At this question both gentlemen changed countenance, for they had not intended to impart the identity of the man known as Malpus Brown with that of Eugene Vernon, who had been Edna's husband, unless it was absolutely necessary. But Roger was waiting for an answer to his question and evidently expected to be made acquainted with more than they had thought well to tell him. It was Mr. Mostyn who replied by asking Roger another:

"Why do you ask that, Mr. Northbrook? Have you any personal knowledge of the man? Any suspicions regarding his identity?"

"Yes, I think I have more than suspicions, I have facts. But these I only discovered a few hours before I left the hut and that through a visit from the man himself. Then I learned that he was none other than an old friend of my own for whom I had been searching for many years, and—what was more important still to me—that he was the long-lost husband of my little friend and nurse, Miss Mysia Grayson, or, I should say —."

"The husband of the nurse!" ejaculated Mr. Esbourne. "What!—surely not?" cried Mr. Mostyn.

"Yes, indeed, I can positively assure you that Nurse Mysia was only that in her professional capacity. Her correct name is Mrs. Reginald Vernon," asserted Roger.

"You astonish me beyond words!" exclaimed Mr. Esbourne, almost breathless with amazement. "You *know* that the man whom we called Malpus Brown was really Reginald Vernon, Mr. Northbrook?"

"I am not likely to make any mistake on that score, for I knew him many years ago in England, when he was quite a youth. I had reason to know him, and it was only when I met you on my return to Australia that I had abandoned my search for him. I had a double reason to seek him and spent three years looking over every likely part of the globe in the hope of finding him. But at last I had to return; and the strange part of it all is that I should have come here,

and here I discovered him on your station, sir," said Roger, turning towards Mr. Esbourne with a grave countenance.

"May I ask why you sought him so anxiously?" enquired Mr. Mostyn, who in his position as a Justice of the Peace thought it necessary to ascertain all particulars before the inquest.

"Yes, there were two reasons, one of which would serve no purpose now to disclose, since it does not affect his present life or his identity; but the second reason was because I wished to bring him back to his young wife whom he deserted five years ago and whom, strangely enough, nursed me through a previous illness some years since, when I learned that she was the wife of my old friend Reginald Eugene Vernon."

"How did you connect him with Malpus Brown, though?" asked Mr. Esbourne, looking very mystified at this tangle of affairs.

"He came to see me, as I told you just now, at the hut after the nurse left it, on Christmas Eve, and there when he took off a wig—I beheld Reg. Vernon," stated Roger.

"Then he wore a wig?" cried both gentlemen at once. "No wonder none of us recognised him again!" said the squatter.

"Why? Did you know him as other than Malpus Brown?" asked Roger, in surprised tones, looking from one to the other.

"We have just discovered that Malpus Brown is Reginald Eugene Vernon. Edna has proved that to us," replied Mr. Esbourne.

"Edna! Miss Esbourne? Does she know him? Did she know Reg. Vernon?" queried Roger, it being his turn to express astonishment at their intelligence.

"Yes, Mr. Northbrook, I regret to say that, greatly to her sorrow, she knew him but too well for her life's happiness," Mr. Esbourne answered in grave tones.

"Did she know him, too, as Brown?" asked Roger.

"No, no! she has only now discovered their identity, and proved it by the cross on his breast. Oh! by the bye, do you know anything about that strange device?" asked the squatter.

"What is that? What strange device do you refer to?" he queried.

"Why, a large red cross over his heart, pricked in Indian ink, with the initials 'R.E.V.' and a dagger below it. Edna says he called it 'his brand of Cain,'" explained her father.

"Edna says so? Miss Esbourne knew it was there? What —— where could she see it?" almost gasped Roger, his face revealing the shock this statement had given him.

"Oh! I forgot, of course, you do not yet know that my daughter was married to Eugene Vernon quite nine years ago."

"What daughter? I did not know you had a married daughter."

"Yes, my eldest daughter Edna Beulah Maya was married to Reginald Eugene Vernon when she was but twenty-one years of age; but it was not a happy union: he treated her in a dastardly manner—he was a scoundrel to her. I cannot really feel sorry to know he is dead," announced the father; his righteous indignation getting the better of him for the moment when he remembered his girl's wrecked life and broken heart in those sad bygone days.

"But she is Miss Esbourne, I thought!" said Roger. "How could she be married to Reg.? He was Mysia's husband."

"Edna obtained a divorce from him," asserted her father. "He gave her ample cause. Poor child, it nearly killed her, she has never been the same girl since. It turned her beautiful black hair quite white, as you see it now. Ah! Mr. Northbrook, I tell you that Reginald Vernon was a scoundrel, even though he might be your friend. He has gone to his account and I fancy it is a long one, too, when it's all reckoned up," said Mr. Esbourne bitterly.

"Then he was a divorced man when he married my little friend Nurse Grayson, it seems? He came to me at the hut to settle an old score that lay between us many years ago in which a woman also had a share, I may add, and I was able to ease his mind about that matter very greatly; but he did not tell me anything about his connection with your family. I knew him only as the lawful husband of Nurse Mysia Grayson."

"You did not say whether you knew anything about that cross on his breast?" suggested Mr. Mostyn.

"No. I did not know there was anything of the sort pricked there," returned Roger. Then, with a flash of intelligence he added, "Oh! now it strikes me what he has had it done for! You tell me that he called it his 'brand of Cain'?" "Yes." "Then, too, there is a dagger in the device?" "Yes." "I know now: Reg. has had it done after he left England, as I may admit to you now, that in a fit of passion he stabbed a girl of whom he was very fond, and thought he had killed her. I, too, was mixed up in the affair; and for his sake and our friendship I hushed it up. She got better and married another lover. Reg. disappeared out of England with the belief that he was a murderer, and thought so up till the other evening, when I dispelled the idea for ever. I searched for him all those years for that purpose, but it seems I have found him too late for the intelligence to benefit either himself or the woman for whose sake I sought him."

"Do you know if he has left any family, Mr. Northbrook?" asked Mr. Mostyn. Then he turned to Mr. Esbourne and, before Roger could answer, said "I think as things have turned out you have reason to be thankful that Edna's little one did not live." To which remark Mr. Esbourne answered by a grave nod of his head. By this Roger learned, too, that Edna had been a mother; but he made no comment, seeing that the subject was a painful one to her father; and he replied to Mr. Mostyn's question by informing the two gentlemen of little Reggie's existence,

and suggesting that a telegram be despatched to the nurse, Mrs. Connors, with whom Mysia lived in Sydney, asking her to bring the little fellow up to his mother's funeral—and father's, too, though the laddie had never known his father.

"Why we asked was because we have discovered what looks like a small fortune on the body of the man, and it is as well to be sure whose it rightfully is, and to find his legal heirs," announced Mr. Mostyn, drawing the bulky belt into view as he spoke. "I think, George, we may as well inspect it here now. Mr. Northbrook appears to have as much, if not more, interest in this affair than we have. What do you say?"

"Certainly, by all means. Let us get all this over as soon as possible," assented the squatter, with a distressed look on his fine old face that made him look years older than usual.

They told Roger how and where the belt was found and then for some time fumbled with the fastenings, which were most intricate, but at length it was opened. The contents were a very great surprise to all there. They found a large sum of money in notes, folded closely together, and pressed into small compass till they filled one of the compartments of the thick leather belt, which had evidently been purposely constructed to hold such valuables. Then in another were a number of very fine Queensland opals, some cut and others in the rough; and in another a quantity of fine gold-dust carefully wrapped up and marked with its weight on the wrapper. Another pocket contained a little packet addressed to Mr. George Esbourne, at "Cumbooqueepa" Station, Wagga Wagga, to whom it was promptly handed by Mr. Mostyn, with the remark that it was probably something of a private character. The squatter took it in silence, but could not bring himself to open it there, so placed it in his pocket for inspection when he felt more composed. In the last pocket of the belt were papers only, which contained all the necessary evidence to establish the identity of Malpus Brown with Reginald Eugene Vernon.

One of these papers was a closely written manuscript which disclosed the whole story of the man's strangely eventful career, and establishing his birth, position and all other details requisite to prove his identity even in a court of law. This manuscript seemed to have been most carefully thought out, and indicted with legal precision, and was written in a fine copper-plate hand that revealed the expert with the pen. Nothing was omitted therefrom, even making as ready mention of his vices as of his virtues ; yet all was told in a plain unvarnished style, without the slightest comment of a personal character. Indeed, Mr. Mostyn remarked when he had finished reading it aloud, "one would think that the man had been writing someone else's life story instead of his own ; he shows such wonderful impartiality throughout the entire narrative."

"Yes," admitted Mr. Esbourne, "does it not seem a pity to see such brilliant talents, as we know they were, wasted ?"

"You are right, sir," interposed Roger, "I know that Reg. Vernon was a brilliant fellow, and I had hoped for better results from him. Yet, I believe your daughter Edna would say, that in all probability no other experiences would have developed such a soul so well as those which have been peculiarly the man's own, during this life."

"Yes, that is just what she would say, I know," assented Mr. Esbourne, "but then Edna was always a most remarkable child from her very infancy. She was born on Christmas morning just as the bells were ringing out 'Peace on Earth, goodwill to man.' I have often wondered since what the end of such a strange life-story as hers will be like. It began in tragedy and so far it appears to me tragedy still follows her footsteps."

"Your Edna is a grand woman, a great soul, Mr. Esbourne. The world wants a few more like her," asserted Roger Northbrook.

"You are right, Mr. Northbrook, I agree with you ; even my own dear boy, my eldest son Sydney, loved

her so dearly that he preferred death rather than life without her. It was a great grief to us all then," said Mr. Mostyn, "but since, we have had reason to think our friend here has gone through worse, and our noble Edna has come through it all in a wonderful way—why, she is a grander woman than ever, I think," he concluded, rising as he spoke and beginning to fold up the belt to conceal his agitation.

Mr. Esbourne had left the room when his old friend referred to his son's death, for this was always a sore spot with them both. Yet it had not made a breach between the two families, and the joys and sorrows of each were shared as before.

Roger had listened to all these latter remarks in silence, for there was so much that had been revealed to him that was new and strange also; he would require time to think it all over. Just as Mr. Mostyn was turning away his foot kicked a folded paper on the floor, which had evidently fallen out from among the others in the belt. Stooping he picked it up and upon opening discovered it to be Reginald Vernon's will properly drawn and attested, from which, upon perusing, the two men discovered that he had left everything unreservedly to his wife, Mysia Salome Vernon, *nee* Grayson, for her whole sole and separate use. Of course, no mention was made of any child or children, since, as already known to Roger—and indeed he would always remain under that impression—Reg. Vernon was ignorant of the existence of a child of his and Mysia's; therefore Reggie was not mentioned at all. Both gentlemen recognised it would be their duty to see to the interests of the little fellow, when all things were put in order; and as other matters now required his urgent attention, Mr. Mostyn left Roger alone.

He was glad to be alone for a time so as he might think over these remarkable revelations, and to nurse his first great heart sorrow over the sudden death of the woman whom he had first loved with anything approaching a serious affection; and yet to know she was another's, and that at this moment she was lying

a corpse in the dead arms of her long lost yet forever restored husband, the father of her little son and, his (Roger's) old boyish friend.

There was another thought, too, that persistently forced itself upon him and took precedence in his mind even before that of the sad death of Mysia; and it was fraught with greater pain than he could account for even to himself. It was that *Edna had been married!* This was her life story, then! This was what turned her hair white and made her so different to all other women! She had been through the furnace of affliction! Yes, and she had also been covered by the ashes of humiliation, for he knew what it must have meant to her—lofty high-souled woman that she was—to have to face the hateful exposures of a divorce court, with a man such as he knew Reg. Vernon could be in his worst hours of profligacy.

No wonder, he mused, that she expressed her opinions so very forcibly upon the inequalities of the marriage state, and woman's disabilities under the present marriage laws. The sentiments and beliefs she voiced must have been wrung from the very depths of her own heart; must have been the agonized breathings of her own tortured soul, smarting under such wrongs as had evidently been inflicted upon her by one whom she had trusted and loved with all the ardour of early girlhood, and who had betrayed her faith.

Can it then be doubted that the terrible end which overtook Reginald Vernon just as he had (as he thought) made preparations for a long and happy life with the woman he loved, yet whose early life he had spoiled by his desertion and neglect, as he also did that of Edna Esbourne and many others unnamed; was the judgment meted out to him with a swift unerring hand for all those past misdeeds? A punishment which in his case perhaps was the most effectual and educational to him as a soul. And although it engulfed another life while striking the blow, we must feel that that too, though a sad sacrifice, was but part

of the punishment so condignly inflicted upon him ; and by its very inclusion thus rendered his own the more salutary, while it might also be the open door to greater development for the soul of the woman.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THERE IS NO DEATH !

" I am fully convinced that the Soul is indestructible, and that its activity will continue through eternity. It is like the Sun, which to our senses seems to set in night, but it has in reality only gone to diffuse its light elsewhere."

—GOETHE.

It was the day of the funeral of Reginald and Mysia Vernon. The bodies lay confined in a small room at the end of the side verandah, and at three o'clock the service would be held.

Edna had been into the room where the bodies lay, and came out with eyes red from weeping, when she heard her name called, and, looking up, beheld Roger Northbrook reclining on a lounge chair at the other end of the verandah. In reply she moved towards him. Loth to let him see her distress just then, she hurriedly dried her eyes. As she came up to where he lay, he said :

" Edna, have you time to sit down and talk to me for a short time ; I have so much to say to you before we have to bid each other good-bye ? "

" Yes, but if you do not mind I will come to you later," she replied ; and she made a movement to pass on, but he caught her hand and detained her for a minute, saying :

" Edna, dear Edna, it grieves me to see you fretting—it is hard to bear, I know—hard for us both—you—you —— "

" Hush ! " she whispered. " I know what you wish to say, but not just now, please, Roger ! "

The next moment she had turned to speak to Mr. Mostyn, who crossed the verandah towards them, and as he paused at Roger's side Edna moved away, leaving the two gentlemen together.

Edna had read through the manuscript found in Reg. Vernon's belt, which revealed his whole life's story; but she was not just then able to discuss the subject with Roger Northbrook, whom her father had told her was a friend of both Reg. and Nurse Mysia. The reason for this reticence on her part towards her dearest friend was indefinable even to herself. She had consequently avoided being alone in Roger's company since the tragedy in case he should refer to the matter before she was sufficiently mistress of her own feelings to be able to speak about it without breaking down. That this proud-spirited woman was suffering very keenly over these recent disclosures was evident to all who watched her and knew the true facts of the case; and for her sake the members of the family at Warrimoo refrained from mentioning the subject in her presence. For this consideration Edna was indeed grateful, for she felt she could not endure that any but the healing finger of God should touch this newly opened wound. And truly God had His own way of healing that sore spot in the woman's heart: a healing that was a most effectual balm for all the wounds of heart or soul which a woman can know—it was the love of a little child!

Passing from the verandah to the sitting room, Edna found Cyril Clifford seated by Gracie's couch with little Reggie Vernon on his knee. Mysia's boy had arrived by that morning's express, accompanied by his old nurse, "Granny Connors," as he called her. He was being taken great notice of, for he was a fine sturdy little fellow just turned five years old, and resembled Reginald Vernon so much that at first sight of the little laddie Edna's heart went out to him with all the wealth of her stored-up mother's love. He was the son of her erring husband since their parting: the child of another woman, yet her husband's legitimate son; and he was brought to her an orphan and friendless. It was as though he were sent to soothe and solace her own desolate years. So Edna took him into her heart as a gift from the hand of God, and was

grateful. She felt that it came to her just then as Eugene's atonement for all the sad and bitter past!

Cyril and Gracie were telling Reggie stories to induce him to forget his childish grief at the loss of his mamma. But though he could understand quite well that his mamma had gone to God with his dada, he did not know who his dada was, for he had never known anyone nearer to him than his mamma and his Granny Connors. Now the problem that was puzzling his small brain was why, if God wanted his dada (as they told him God did), why couldn't He just take him and leave Reggie his own dear mamma?

This was the question the little lips were framing as Edna entered the room and joined the group, where she seated herself opposite Cyril, on whose lap Reggie was ensconced, for he had made friends with the young curate very readily. Then Edna told the child that God was his Heavenly Father and would always be that to him, although He had taken his earthly father and mother to heaven.

The boy looked up at Edna as she spoke and with a bright gleam of intelligence in his fine blue eyes, said:

"Well, if Dod is my Father, who will be my mamma now?"

"I will, Reggie. Will you have me for your new mamma, dear?" replied Edna, with a strange thrill in her voice and a great throb of joy in her heart as she held out her arms towards the child. "I will love you very dearly if you will come and be my little boy always."

With a spring the little fellow leaped from Cyril's knees and clambered upon Edna's lap, where he nestled close to her bosom and said in his childish treble: "'Es, I'll be 'oor 'ittle boy, I will. 'Cause I love 'oo, I do."

Then the woman gathered the child up very close to her heart and bent her head and kissed the rosy face and sunny curls, while the tears welled into her eyes and she buried her face there for a few moments to hide

her emotion. Yes, this was the compensation for the aching void that had so long filled her large heart ; this was God's way of doing things. She had been given this child to train and teach as she believed she would be able to do ; to develop this bright little intellect till by precept and example she should rear him in such a way that his whole future life would be an atonement for the sins committed by the father. Thus, thought Edna, may it not be possible to reverse the curse, and instead of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generation, rather will not the children of the first and second so live that they shall offer their regenerated lives as atonement for the parent's errors. That, at least she determined, would be the case with Reggie Vernon if it was to be her privilege to have the bringing up of the boy. Just then the child's voice broke into her train of thought by saying :

"Don't 'oo cry. My mamma used to cry, but when I tised her she'd get better. I'll tiss 'oo too and then 'oo won't cry any more, will 'oo ? " And drawing Edna's face down close to his own, he kissed her heartily and patted her cheeks with both hands, saying with a smiling cheerfulness, "Now 'oo's better, isn't 'oo ? Reggie soon make 'oo better, same as I did my own mamma." Then the little fellow drew a diminutive handkerchief out of his tiny pocket and very gently began to wipe the tears from Edna's cheeks and rubbed till he was satisfied they were quite dry. This pathetic little drama had been watched by the other two with smiles and tears very much mixed up, and the sadness that was in Edna's heart was soothed by the love and tenderness evinced in this simple act of the little child.

Just at this time, Tessie and Mina Mostyn came in with a poor drooping specimen of a white cockatoo, which Tessie stated one of the men had found the previous evening in the hamper-basket of the "overlander." The poor bird was still alive, but little more. They had fed it, they stated, and thought it would revive, for those wild birds are very tenacious of life

and can exist for days without food or water. Edna remembered the incident of the bird dropping at her feet in the buggy that evening on her way to Honey-suckle Hut ; and now it had survived all those terrible experiences. Then it was indeed entitled to live and she would do all in her power to save its flickering life. So she took the little limp fledgling in her hand and stroked its white plumage and also let Reggie fondle the now tamed bird, saying :

" Reggie, dear, I am going to try and get this birdie well and strong again, and it shall be yours. We will christen it ' Mascotte,' which means ' good luck.' We will believe that it is going to bring only all that is good—or from God—into our lives. The bird was meant for Gracie, but I am sure she would rather that you had it."

" Oh! yes, of course I would, and I feel sure it will get better, because Edna is such a wonderful doctor," said Gracie. " Why, Reggie, I believe she can cure almost anything or anyone."

" Can she ? " questioned the child with wide open eyes. " Then why don't she make 'oo get up and walk like me ? You're sick, isn't 'oo ? "

" Yes, I have been for a very long time, Reggie, but Edna has been healing me, with the help of God ; and I will be better some day soon," returned Gracie, smiling at Cyril, who was watching the puzzled face of the child.

" Why don't she do it now right at once't ? " he persisted.

" Well, you know, dear Reggie, the other doctors can't cure you at once, they take time and you have to wait a very long time in some cases," argued Gracie, amused at the child's intelligence.

" Yes, I know. My mamma was sick once't—sick for a long, long time, and doctor cured her. He used to take me for a ride in his buggy, he did. Dod ain't like the doctor, is He ? " This with a questioning glance at Edna, on whose knee he still sat, nursing the bird which he would not let go.

"No, Reggie," she answered gravely, "God is not like the doctors, for God's time is *now*! Just when our faith is strong enough to believe, then we are healed. But our Gracie is being healed by God, because she never walked at all for a very long time, not since she was as small as you are now; but when she was in danger from the big fires the other day, like your dear mamma, she just believed that God could help her and she did walk on her own feet. That was because she had faith; faith to know that our Father which art in Heaven will always help His children on earth."

"Then why didn't He help my mamma when she was in the big fire?" urged the boy wistfully.

"Perhaps because mamma forgot to ask God to help her, Reggie," suggested Cyril Clifford, gently stroking the little fellow's hair.

"Well, couldn't God help my mamma without her asking Him? 'Cause I always says, 'Our Father,' them's my prayers, to Granny every night, I do. And Granny says God knows me, so He must 'a knowed that it was my mamma, too? He ought'er saved her, He ought," concluded the child, with a sob in his voice, and Edna hastened to reassure him by saying—

"You are quite right, Reggie, God does know you, dear, and you will know Him too some day. But just in the same way as you did not know your dada, who is in there with mamma, so perhaps your dear mother did not know our Father well enough to believe that if she called to Him to help and save her when she was in danger He would do it as surely as I should if you asked me to do anything for you that was right and good for you."

The child did not grasp the whole meaning of the words, but his little mind had caught an idea from reference to the room where he knew his mamma lay so fast asleep in her pretty white dress in that box with all the shiny things on it, beside the other one, too, on whom he would not look, but cried when Granny Connors asked him to "kiss his poor dear father," when she had taken him in to see his dead parents.

But the astute mind of the boy had also grasped the meaning of the latter part of Edna's remarks, and knew that it implied a promise to do anything he should ask her, just like God would. So, looking up into her face frankly, he said :

" I want you to take me in there to show my mamma the pretty bird. My mamma likes birds, she do ; this one might make her wake up and speak to Reggie like she used to do once't ! "

Edna had not anticipated this demand when she so rashly made the offer by way of illustration, but she considered that no promise should ever be made to a child which we are not prepared to fulfil or to give a very good reason for not doing so. It is apt to weaken the child's faith and trust in the only God it knows at that early stage of its development : the God it sees in the face of those it learns to love. So accordingly, without further demur, she agreed, knowing that hesitation would weaken her lesson ; and rising with Reggie in her arms, she went silently across the room, breathing an inward prayer for wisdom and guidance, how to deal with this young enquiring soul that had been committed to her charge.

The coffins were in a small ante-room off the dining-room, which opened into the conservatory on one side and could be entered from the verandah on the other. Edna had passed through an open French light from the large sitting room and traversed the verandah till she reached the room which had been set apart for the dead. Edna entered that silent room, darkened from the fierce rays of the afternoon sun by green venetian blinds, so that the apartment was in comparative gloom except for an open chink which let in sufficient light to see the forms that lay there so silent and still. The gloomy room frightened the sensitive child, for he trembled and hid his face on Edna's shoulder ; and she (divining the feeling that prompted the little fellow to shrink from that which he had but just now most desired) patted his head soothingly and laid her cheek against his reassuringly,

saying as she turned and closed the door behind her :
"It's all right, Reggie dear. Do not be afraid, my pet. God is here, for God is everywhere."

Then she turned and, as the room was small, she found herself by the side of the trestle on which the coffins stood side by side. The rays of light, that shone but faintly through the chinks of the blinds, revealed to her astonished gaze the form of a man seated by the side of those quiet sleepers ; his head leaning upon his hands ; his elbows on his knees ; and one leg reclining upon a chair that had been placed opposite where he sat. For a second her own heart stood still. Next moment Edna guessed who it was, and in a whisper that was interrogatory and yet relieved, voiced the one word, "Roger?"

"Yes, Edna, it is only I. Come to me. I was wishing for you very intensely, and this must be the answer. But—but, I see you have the child with you," he observed.

"Yes, Reggie wished to come and show the bird to his mamma, and as I had just promised I would do anything he asked, I had to keep my word when he wished to come here. But why—how did you get here, and alone?" she asked, still speaking very low.

"I persuaded Mr. Mostyn to help me, with the aid of this stick, for, oh! Edna, I felt I must look upon her face again for the last time. You—you do not know all she was to me once," he replied in broken accents.

Just then Reggie began to cry, for the gloom of the room and the presence of these two white forms terrified him, and he begged to be taken away. He no longer had any desire to show his pet bird to his mamma, and with nerveless fingers let the little captive free. It fluttered from the hand of the child and lighted upon the edge of his mother's coffin. The boy took no notice of the loss of the pet he had been so carefully nursing ; but as his sobs increased Edna felt it would be cruel to keep him there any longer. She was going out with a few caressing words to the child,

when Roger said : " Don't go away, Edna. Let the child go, but you stay for a little while, do ! " he begged.

Edna had opened the door leading into the conservatory, intending to take Reggie back, and then return to Roger, when she saw the form of the child's old nurse seated in a distant corner among the plants ; her grey head bent and her hands covering her face, evidently weeping over the sad fate of her bonnie laddie's mother. Edna's first thought was to go and comfort the old woman, then she suddenly remembered the solace she had herself received from the hands of a little child, and by an inspiration she whispered to Reggie, whose face was still buried on her shoulder sobbing :

" Look ! Reggie, there is poor granny all by herself crying. Won't you go and comfort her the same way as you did me a little while ago ? "

" The little fellow raised his head quickly from Edna's shoulder, revealing a tear-stained face, while he sobbed in a half-whining tone : " Where ? "

" Over there, Reggie dear. Look in the big chair under that palm," said Edna, pointing to the spot as she set him on his feet ; and the next moment he was running towards the good old woman who from his infancy had loved and cared for the bonnie little chap.

Edna did not wait to watch the meeting nor the effect of it upon the old lady ; but quietly shut the door and returned to the spot where she had left the man bowed with a load of grief, and whom she saw at a glance needed comfort. Four, five, perhaps ten, seconds passed without a sound being uttered ; Roger still sat with head bowed, and Edna stood looking down upon that bent form and broad shoulders—not upon the two figures that lay so still there beside them, taking their last long sleep—no, her whole sympathy was now given to the living, not to the dead, and her one prayer was—How could she best comfort him ?

Edna Esbourne had never thought of this man as women are apt to think of a man who has said as

much, or little even, as did Roger to her on that never-to-be-forgotten night. Her every thought had been absolutely pure, undefiled by even the shadow of that passion which the world calls love. Her feelings for Roger Northbrook were above and beyond the physical: they saw not the form—the shape of man—but the unfolding soul that dwelt therein. Then as she recognised that soul as the Temple of God, she felt that even the precincts of that temple were sacred or holy ground to her own soul. They had already recognised each other apart from their bodies, and that recognition was a bond of union that was indissoluble: a link that would bind them as one throughout eternity, even though they should never be any more to each other than they were at this moment: never drew nearer to each other on this earthly plane than they had already done, when they stood at midnight beneath the starlit heavens with clasped hands only, while he knelt in worship at her feet.

While Edna stood there her mind was turning over rapidly much that had been agitating it since she had first beheld death in its present form. One thought that would persistently recur to her was voiced by one of her favorite poets. "There is no death. What seems so is transition," had rung in her ears till she found herself questioning the meaning of the statement, and trying to reconcile it with her new Truths. She had not needed to analyze these thoughts before, as the dread visitant had been a comparative stranger to her home: the only ones she had ever lost being Sydney Mostyn and her own little baby. But these losses had happened at a period of her life when she was not capable of reasoning about the why and the wherefore of the mysterious passing out of our loved ones. Now, however, it had forced itself upon her in a most unexpected manner, and she felt herself compelled to face this enemy of life, and know it truly for what it really was. Why it should have the power to level all heads; and bring with its visitation much sorrow, and

in the grief of bereavement make the "whole world akin"?

Edna had thought this question out in her room after leaving the barn the day of the tragedy; but she had only received the answer in the abstract: she had not attempted to put it into concrete thought. Now, however, it seemed to surge through her brain with a clearness, a distinctness, that made her cheeks burn and her whole body quiver with the force of the new revelation that had burst upon her, as if in answer to her great desire to know. There, by the side of those two forms now lying before her locked in that grim visitant's cold arms, and without any preliminary remarks to the man who sat near her, Edna Esbourne began to speak what was in her: to speak it aloud in tones that were subdued, yet which thrilled upon the ears of her solitary listener with a strange vibrating power that aroused all his numbed faculties and made him to realize that "a greater than Edna—the mortal woman—was there." That as Job says: "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding." It was this Spirit that Roger Northbrook seemed to be listening to, while Edna's voice expressed in a deeply reverent tone her wonderful interpretation of the meaning of Death!

Throwing back her head and lifting her eyes till they rested upon the faces of the sleepers in their coffins, she stood with one hand resting on the edge of that in which Mysia's white shrouded form lay, and said:

"Death! Oh! what is this we call Death? How I have longed to be able to fully grasp the real meaning of this strange mystery! Why, oh! Roger—why should the dear ones we love, whom we know are children of the Great All-Father Who is Infinite Life—brothers and sisters of Jesus Christ, who overcame death—why, I ask, should these ever die?"

She paused a moment as though expecting a reply, then as Roger did not answer, but sat looking at her expectantly, she continued:

"Yet, I think that, like evil and darkness, Death also is *not*—is not a reality! It is only our lack of ability to grasp firmly in our minds, and hold unfalteringly to the one and only reality—Life! Just as we—you and I—have learned to know and hold in our consciousness the fact that there is only good—or one God! The Singer of Israel said, "Ye are gods," and that would surely mean that we are the offspring of a God? Yet as we believe that there is but one God and Father of All, Who is above all, over all, and through all, we individually—that is each and every soul—must belong to or is a part of that One Omnipresent Life. Therefore, while we are gods, because co-heirs with the Son of God, the Lord God, we are also God's because an integral part of the One Almighty Father, being owned and possessed by Him as part of Himself; just as my hand is a part of me though I am interdependent of it, yet incomplete and imperfect without it. Still it cannot say *it is ME*. "Without Me ye can do nothing," said the God in Jesus. Thus in reality is the one indissolubly a part of the other."

She paused here, but Roger did not attempt to interrupt her train of thought, so she continued more musingly:

"I read as my text this morning what Paul says, 'The body is not one member, but many. And if they were all one member, where was the body? But now are they many members, but one body.' This text helped me greatly in my mental debate upon this subject. I take the great body to be Christ—the Divine of all of us—which is God's perfect expression of Omnipresent yet Unmanifest Life—except as it is revealed in and through Him, or in this manner. Thus the body is not spiritually complete and perfect in every part, till every member therein is also perfect. In the same way, for example, as you are now not in harmony throughout your being because of the injured and weak state of your leg; yet if that limb were amputated you would still continue to live without it,

but would not express the perfect form of a man. Then in this way the Real Self, the Divine Man in each of us, *never dies*, though the members through which that divinity manifests may not yet be perfect, and retard the completion of the Christ that is to become visible in the world of forms. These forms are but the fleshly tabernacles in which the Spirit of the Lord manifests Himself to grow to greater and greater perfection. God the Life, then, being Spirit, must express Himself—or Itself—through spiritual beings. Therefore, when each form—or shape—becomes moulded to the highest degree of perfection, or, as Jesus puts it, ‘is able to do the will of the Father which is in heaven,’ the rest of the body will be gradually completed and the Son of God—of which Jesus Christ is the Head (always the first part to become visible in the new birth)—will slowly yet surely evolve its various members till all shall be revealed and stand forth to visibility, just as Jesus did eighteen hundred years ago. He was a perfected type of the highest, a type to which we are all growing, and then we shall be conscious gods, for we shall see the Father in ourselves, and our eyes shall behold the King in His beauty. In the meantime these imperfect ones must die, or pass away, till perfection in and through them is revealed. Then Christ lives for ever ! ”

Edna’s speech had flowed rapidly, yet evenly, and she seemed to have forgotten towards the end that she was speaking to another.

Roger, who had now thrown aside the shadow of grief which had rested upon him when Edna entered, said eagerly :

“ Edna ! Edna, where do you get your wonderful wisdom ? It amazes me. Have you a source to others unknown ? ”

“ No, Roger,” she replied, quietly turning towards him, “ I have no source other than that open to every seeking soul. These ideas just come out of myself when I begin to speak after seeking in the Silence for an answer to a question that has perhaps puzzled me,

as this one regarding the mystery of death did yesterday."

"Was this the answer you got?" he inquired.

"Yes, I suppose it must have been," she answered musingly, "with something more that I feel within me yet, but it came in the inner consciousness, I fancy, because I did not know it was like what I have said to you just now till I heard it uttered by my own tongue. Do you know, Roger, that while I am revealing things to you I am also teaching myself: gaining instruction in these hidden mysteries—or perhaps I should say the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom has been instructing us both?"

"Has that Spirit then told you, Edna, why she should die?" he asked, motioning towards Mysia's still form.

"Ah! that is as yet not quite clear, Roger," she said, shaking her head sadly, "though I feel there is a reason deep in myself, but I am not permitted to judge another soul. The Bible says: 'Why will ye die?' Then it seems to me that means it *is* possible to live—to never die—if we only knew how. Just as all the time it was possible to navigate the seas by steamboats and the air with balloons; only till we knew *how*, it was to us as though it were not. It seems to me that nothing is impossible to man. That like Jesus Christ we shall be able to overcome death and rise superior to its power. This, too, though like Him we may even lay down or move out of these fleshly tabernacles, we shall do so consciously and of our own choice, and shall be able to reveal the true man—the spiritual body within them. Just as Jesus formed through His own creative power by holy thoughts and divine wisdom, the spiritual body which was seen by His disciples and known to us to-day as the risen Christ! But, Roger, we cannot do this till we learn the true meaning of life; otherwise we should be apt to use our power for our own undoing. We can only gain this great and glorious end by living the same pure and holy life in the body which He did, or these things are not

possible to us. If they were, then there would be no distinction between doing right and wrong actions. If it mattered not *how* we lived the life entrusted to our keeping by the Lord of Life, the same results would accrue to all and the world would return to chaos!" Continuing, she questioned: "Do you mean to tell me that *you* should be given the same reward as one who, like this erring son" (pointing to the form of Reginald Vernon beside her), "neglected his divine birth-right for the red pottage of the world's pleasures; and have equal benefits only with one who has brought sorrow and pain on many, who has spoiled several lives, and ruined his own chance of happiness on this plane, thus retarding the onward, upward progress of his soul to its final perfection in the One Life? No, Roger, you must admit that there would be no credit for honesty, purity and loving service done often at great self sacrifice: no reward for truth, if the results were equal!" She paused and they were both silent, then Edna resumed:

"I am convinced that if we will but put away from us our evil thoughts and desires; overcome them as we would any other enemy to our peace and safety; live up to the highest we know each day of our lives—never below it—we shall be living the Christ life just as much as Jesus did when He walked in Judea. If we really believe all is Spirit and that Spirit is Omnipresent, we must be convinced that we are living in a vast sea of Spirit: the Life of the Whole, or that which we call God! Therefore we know that it is not for one soul more than another, *only* as we each appropriate it, just as Jesus did. Then if for argument's sake we admit that 'all souls go unto the Father,' that is back into the One Life Essence, we must believe that they are all good, since we cannot conceive of God being anything *but* GOOD. Then these portions of the One Universal Life must all be part of the One Great Spirit which is All-Good! Therefore, to us, they cannot ever be evil."

"Yes, your argument is good, Edna," admitted

Roger, "but the idea does away with that which has expressed itself as evil here. You know there are influences around us that are not all good!"

"True! that is, if we give entity to evil, it would appear so," she assented, "but do you know, Roger, that I have come to think that the only evil we have to contend with, to fight against, is the evil here in these fleshly temples. This evil is caused by the error thoughts sent forth upon the atmosphere by ourselves and others around us, who, in their ignorance of the 'better way' of thinking, use their will-power wrongly and, as I have just said, being so indissolubly bound together as one humanity—like pearls on a string, and the string is the One Infinite Life—not any one of us can even think without affecting his brother."

"This places a great responsibility on each of us," he observed. "It should make us pause before we ever give life to a wrong thought, let alone a word of evil, since if we can suffer by the wrong actions of others, the thought must have been behind it, and in like degree will others be affected by the nature or character of ours."

"Exactly," responded Edna quickly. "Roger, do you know that I believe this is the thought which shall save the world: the idea that will redeem all souls. It so fully answers the question of the first murderer, 'Am I my brother's keeper?' Of course we are, since we often murder each other more effectually by our evil thoughts towards them than we can by an act of our hands. Just in the same degree as we are our own keepers are we our brothers'. We are our own best friend or our own worst enemy, and in like manner our brother's also, and by our brother we mean our neighbor, as Jesus termed him, and that surely is all mankind? How often are we murdering our brothers and sisters by our ungenerous thoughts, our wrong thoughts against them of anger, envy, jealousy, sickness, disease, and even death! With all such weapons do we secretly take our brother's life and

ourselves become outcasts, bearing the brand of our shame ! ”

“ That is a very fine thought, Edna, and one that would enrich the world if it could be accepted and adopted by mankind,” he remarked. “ Then if these two little ones had but put it into operation in their lives you think they need not have been here ? ”

“ No, because they would have enfolded themselves round in the garment of love to one another, and in perfect love there is no death. I believe if our Father's children knew they are heirs to the divine inheritance ; and would recognise their sonship with God the One Life ; and all combine to refuse to even name, let alone admit, the power of that fiend called Death, it would take to itself wings and fly away into its native nothingness—for it is Negation! Just the same as the cessation of belief at the present day in that cunning imposter, the Devil, has caused him to lose much of his power even with the children of the world, and the fear of him to disappear altogether from our mental horizon. In this way he has no longer power to terrify the race into servile obedience, as he so long did. The Truth has now made them free from such rank imposters as devils, hells, diseases and soon—very soon—Death, too, will be cast into the bottomless pit—nothingness ! This will be the last enemy to eternal progress and the ultimate perfection of the race which came out from God, who is Life, and must return to God. Then Life which is God will reign supreme from everlasting to everlasting.”

“ But, Edna, you really think there will be a time when here in these bodies we shall live for ever—that we shall not die ? Surely all must die ? ” expostulated Roger.

“ Yes, and so they will while they think it is necessary ; while they continue to change their place of abode, thinking to better their condition, in the same manner as a tenant may change his residence (as we are going to change ours for a time), but that is entirely a matter of choice to man if he will but come to think

that it is possible for him to make his heaven or highest state of consciousness here and now. If God is Omnipresent surely He is as great here as elsewhere in His Universe? The seed when planted in the ground is just as much in the nature of the tree as when it is full grown: it has but to pass through various stages of growth to unfold all that is inherent in it from the beginning. So the soul, being the only thing that grows in man, is really that which is putting on new states of consciousness which express themselves in his body till out of the old man the new man is evolved. But the real self is the same 'yesterday, to-day and forever'; it has all the potentialities of perfection in it from the first, just like the seed. Jesus said, 'I Am the Resurrection and the Life, he that believeth on Me shall never die—shall never see Death.' I think the meaning of this statement is, that they who will but realize their interdependence on and oneness with the Father Who is the Only Reality—the One Life Principle—and thus claim their true inheritance—their inherent divinity—shall never see nor recognize, in other words, admit the existence of such a thing as *nothingness*—that which we call death! Therefore, such non-recognition of a thing to which man refuses power, such, I insist, can have no power over him. Then let us combine to ignore this *THAT IS NOT I AM*. Then, lo! there need be no delay in the coming of the Kingdom of God. It is here now with us waiting to be recognised as our rightful possession. But it cannot be claimed by strangers or heathen, such as will not know God nor recognize the God-power within them, and nothing can enter it that loveth or maketh a lie—*Death is a lie*. Therefore it is not likely to be taken by any but those for whom it is prepared, those who will fit themselves by living the life to claim that kingdom of power over death: that kingdom which is within them; they indeed are heirs to all its glories and verily *have eternal life here and now*. They are in the Kingdom of God their Father and all its treasures are theirs!"

"Then, Edna, you mean to say that we have only to recognise and affirm that it is possible to live for ever in continuous consciousness of ourselves, and death will have no power over us? That we cannot die? How, dear Edna, could that be possible when we see death all around us? When we see it here before us now in such a very palpable form and with all its terrors, too?" Roger urged, doubtingly, thinking that she was perhaps carried beyond herself by the extreme nervous strain which he knew she was under at that moment and had been suffering from for several days.

"Quite true, you do right to remark upon that," admitted Edna, "but first of all we cannot claim the kingdom by affirmation unless we believe what we are affirming, nor even then, unless we will *live the life*, the pure life of Jesus Christ, for the 'pure in heart alone see God,' and to see God you must get into the Kingdom of God. But in respect to your latter question about seeing death all around us, I think that even that can be overcome since all true reforms must be gradual, and someone must first think of a reform before it can become one. Jesus thought of the reform of overcoming death, and we must adopt His thought ourselves and endeavor to help this reform so as this new kingdom may open up on earth to us. We are denizens of earth and this earth should be our paradise, as it was intended to be from the beginning of this creation. Therefore if we, as sons of Adam and sons of God, would reap all the benefits which accrue to us as joint heirs with both our earthly and our heavenly parents, do you not think that as we come into harmony with the higher we shall soon express that perfection in the lower, and thus bring all things into subjection to us: or what is really the Lord or Divine Self of every living creature? It is this Lord that shall have dominion and power and reign for ever and ever."

"How, though, can this be done?" he questioned. "What part have we as individuals in the great consummation, Edna?"

"Why! we who see the Light of the Truth must

proclaim it to others, and when they in turn see it in such like manner they must also pass it on and live up to the truth they know, then by degrees the little heaven will leaven the whole lump of humanity, till all shall agree to ignore, and thus overcome this one great enemy to our peace—this interrupter which removes us from our scene of operations before our time : before our soul's work is finished, or we have properly learned to use our tools—the body ; and interferes with our soul development, without our consent, too, as it has done with these our dear ones ; for the shrinking from death was planted in the soul of man for a wise purpose—man was never intended to die—Life alone was his inheritance. Now, as we know, the power of thought from others can affect us for our good or ill, our sickness or health, our happiness or woe, if we will permit it to do so ; in like manner the universal belief in this false power named death has kept it alive, so to speak—has accentuated its activity amongst our race. It is then the only—yea indeed the last—enemy to be overcome by the soul. We now know that by right thinking we can cure our diseases of the mind and the body ; so by thinking—or refraining from it—shall we be able to annihilate this one foe to man's immortality and uninterrupted progress to eternal life : the one and only goal of the soul. Let us everyone say :

“ *Death!* I say unto thee *thou art not!* I am an immortal self-conscious being, imbued with Divine Spirit and possessing eternal life within myself : I have no belief in thee, therefore thou hast no power over me. I am an undying expression of Omnipresent Limitless, Infinite *Life*, and by my recognition of that Life—God Who is the One *Reality*—I am one with the Father and the one Source of all Life, and so a very god over whom thou hast no power ; I am a letter in the alphabet of God's Book of Life, from which the Word was spoken out of the bosom of the Father ; and like Him from Whom I originated *I am* immortal and *you* cannot rub *me* out. If so, then you could obliterate God Himself, and by so doing you would be

greater than that which created Me ; and then you also would annihilate your parasitical self, for you are a figment of the mind of man and have no root in eternity. Begone ! thou shadow ! thou ghost of infant minds ! I fear thee not, no longer hast thou power over me, for I as a Living Soul know thee for what thou art—*nothingness!* ”

The voice of Edna ceased and she closed her eyes as though to rest her mind from the strain that her speech must have put upon it. Indeed, from the appearance of the pale face, with its deep-set eyes, which showed dark rings of weariness, although the fires of the living spirit burned intensely in the depths of those dark orbs, it almost seemed to Roger as though Edna had been used by a spirit stronger than her own and wiser than she even knew she was, through which to voice this great lesson on death ! Where did she get her mystic wisdom otherwise ? That was the question that was puzzling the man who now sat calmly contemplating that still face now in repose, such a contrast to what it was when the varied expressions born of deep thought and intense enthusiasm were flashing over its features like lightnings from a western sky. After a minute or two, Edna opened her eyes and looked into his with a smile as she said softly, almost repentantly :

“ My friend, forgive me again. I am afraid I have spoken too much. That I have wearied you with my talk. I must plead for indulgence, since I was in reality but thinking aloud. I fancy there are times when I am unconscious that I have a listener, though had I not known at first that I actually had one I could not so voice my thoughts. The Spirit uses me thus at times, and I must confess it has been very hard lately not to have the privilege of pouring my numerous new thoughts into your always receptive ears, knowing that you do understand. I missed you very much, Roger, while you have been ill, and to-day is the first opportunity I have had to speak freely all that I am

feeling now. If the time and place be unseasonable let the subject be my excuse."

"Edna, dear Edna, please say no more in extenuation of yourself!" interrupted Roger. "You do know, or you ought to know, that I have missed you very greatly, indeed more than I knew could be possible while you were unable to come to me at the hut during the time I was ill there. I ——."

"I was always able to come, and did come; but you know nurse thought that you were not well enough to be talked to then, and she knew best," answered Edna quietly.

Roger made no reply to this statement, but sat thoughtfully gazing at the coffin by his side. There was a struggle going on in his breast, indeed it had been raging for some time now, but it had reached its height while Edna had been speaking, and his whole soul had gone out in deep admiration and reverence for the woman. But he knew that to still this turmoil he must open his heart to her at once: for if he held his peace and buried the secret of his love for Mysia in the grave with her (as he was tempted to do) he would forfeit his own self-respect, and perhaps Edna's, too, in the years to come, should she ever learn the truth.

"Edna," he said at length, "your woman's insight is most remarkable. What you have said to-day will give me food for thought for many days when I am removed again from your presence, and I shall not be able to listen to your beautiful ideas or discuss those new truths with you. My meeting with you has made a new man of me already. You have given me a strength and courage that I never had before, and indeed I, who have prided myself upon knowing most things worth knowing, as I thought, must now admit that there is much yet for me to learn, and that this knowledge can be gained from a woman. I also know your love and sympathy to be great, and have proved that your power to forgive human weakness is larger than that of most women; otherwise you could not have borne up and acted as you have done under

your life's sorrow and this more recent blow and its consequent revelations. I ——."

"Hush!" whispered Edna, raising her hand, "it is over; it is past. Let this dead past bury its dead and we—I—shall rise to walk in newness of life and help to strengthen other struggling souls such as was his." Then she added, "Who can tell but that he is only my dead self, and that his better self lives again in my higher conception of life: for we know there is good—or God, in us all."

"If that be so, Edna, then I too may take comfort, and hope that she is but my dead self also: that to-day I am a nobler, better man because she has passed on, that I may live on a higher plane of consciousness. That she lives again in me, stronger, happier, and also redeemed, through my higher knowledge of what life means for me and for her henceforth. Tell me, Edna, that it is so, *for I loved her.*" He spoke in tones that were husky with emotion.

Edna made no reply for a short time to this startling statement. She wanted to think a moment and try to realize what it all meant to him. How she should answer him and yet not wound the already tortured heart of the man, which was plain to her, but this was a revelation she had not for a moment contemplated. Now she understood his great anxiety about the fate of Mysia; yes, now she knew why nurse would not admit her to see him; many little incidents flashed across her mind while she stood before him silent. Then she moved softly to his side and, laying her hand upon his shoulder, said in tender sympathetic tones that soothed his racked nerves:

"Roger! Roger! My own dear friend! I am so glad, so very glad that this was so. It is indeed the hand of the Lord and He truly doeth all things well; you can see His loving hand in this also. Know you not that a soul that is loved dearly and faithfully by another when it passeth is richly blessed. Thy love shall enfold the soul which thou lovest, and it shall be to her a wedding garment; while the sorrow

and tears shall be a grace to the soul of her thou mournest, and she shall rise because of it. Consider not thy suffering on behalf of her soul lost, for every cry and sob of pain is a prayer, and all prayer is power and aideth the ascending soul. Oh ! little soul, thou art mighty if a child of God love thee, yes, poor and simple soul, thou art possessed of great and inexhaustible riches, if thou art loved truly in thy hour of physical dissolution by another and stronger soul, for in the eyes of love there is nothing little, nor poor, nor unworthy of prayer," asserted Edna, with a bright glow on her cheeks that her ardour had called there, but which now quickly subsided.

Roger Northbrook raised his head suddenly while she was speaking, and, meeting the eyes that smiled down upon him so softly, exclaimed in surprise :

" You are glad, Edna ? How can that be ? You cannot know what it has cost me to resolve to tell you ! But how can you say it was the hand of the Lord, or even in her soul's interests, that I—I—should love *another man's wife* ? "

" But you—you, Roger, did her no wilful wrong ? " said Edna gravely.

" No, no ! I swear unto you that I did not ; she could answer to that herself if her dear lips could speak once more," he cried earnestly. " I did not even know that she was another's till—till I had spoken, and not even till some time later—yet I still loved her, Edna. I loved her with a different love than one I have known since." He stopped short and Edna said :

" There is only one love, and that is pure and true and the one to whom it is given is drawn upwards and advanced thereby ; a love that cometh from a heart that is clean and whose intentions are innocent profiteth both the loved and the lover, Roger. Anything else called by the name of love is but the shadow of a distorted fancy, and worketh no good."

" I vow I loved her and held her stainless as a saint, Edna," protested Roger. " She is inviolate and his faithful wife in act as in name, though I know in

thought we were both in error, for Mysia loved me, too, and loved me to the last, although it was in his arms she lay when death claimed her for its own—and with him as her companion ushered her into the world of spirits; he who was her husband, and, I am now convinced, loved her very dearly, though he showed it in such a strange manner, and ——.”

Roger paused, for he had forgotten while he was speaking that this man had first been the husband of the woman who now stood by his side, and that he had evidently once professed to love *her* best of all. He feared that he might, by his thoughtless remark, have unwittingly wounded her sensitive spirit that had already suffered so terribly. Then he said pleadingly, as he laid his hand upon hers, where it still rested upon his shoulder :

“Forgive me, Edna, I forgot that—that you, too, had once loved him as I have loved her.”

Edna visibly changed color and a little sob rose in her throat. She did not speak and Roger saw that he had caused her more pain by his apology than if he had kept silence, so he added in distressed accents while he still held her hand tightly in his :

“Edna, Edna, I have been cruel unintentionally. I forgot all. I understand now how you must feel about this. You, too, have been through the same experience as I, when I too learned that he had a prior claim to her. That was nearly four years ago. Since then I have tried valiantly to crush the memory of my love for her out of my heart; I set myself the penance, as an atonement, to search everywhere for her missing husband. And while I was abroad I tried hard to forget. But, Edna, it was difficult with a man like myself, who had never spoken words of love to a woman before, and I only partially succeeded till I came here and met you—you, who have by your sweet womanly nature and nobility of character revealed to me what a good woman really is. How by her purity and truth she shows a man what is expected from him; what he must be; what she demands he shall be, if he

would call himself a man in the truest sense of the term, and aspire to win her! From the hour that revelation was made to me in the garden that holy night, Edna, I resolved to put all unworthy thoughts of another far from me; to live the inner life as well as the outer, that should make me worthy in my own eyes first and then perhaps some day I might be thought worthy in yours. I had intended to remould my ideas of what a man's life should be; to enlarge my code of morals, so that I might find room in my heart for this greater, broader, higher love that had been revealed to me: that one great crowning joy of a man's maturer life—the love of a pure and high-souled woman, such as I know you to be, Edna! This I was trying to do, despite the fact that fate, after several years, again brought into my life the very one I had been striving to forget; brought Mysia, sweeter and fairer than ever to my bedside while I was weak and helpless, and though my old temptation came back to me, for some time I was able to resist it. But it came with renewed force, and many times I had to subdue a strong yearning, an intense desire to clasp her in my arms and kiss her dear lips as I had done before. But I fought this enemy to my peace and her wifely honor till—till that fatal Christmas Eve, when, owing to her chancing to discover an old photograph of herself in a book she was turning over—which I since learned was Reg. Vernon's, left there when he lived at the hut as Malpus Brown—she burst into a fit of passionate weeping and her tears fell upon my hand as she stood beside me. Then, Edna, then I forgot everything, forgot all my good resolves; only remembered that she was a woman: a woman, too, in tears; and that I loved her and knew she loved me and—and—Edna, I fell!" Roger paused a moment, his voice husky, but the woman by his side did not move nor speak and he continued in lower tones, with a tinge of deep regret in his voice:

"Yes, I gathered her into my arms and madly kissed her cheeks and eyes and mouth, while I whispered

all the passion of love that surged through my heart and leaped unbidden to my lips. I loved her then with all my human heart—just the passionate love of a natural man for a natural and very lovely woman—and she, she listened and responded. Then, well then," he sighed, "when reason regained her throne and passion was deposed, I regretted my madness, but too late. To atone, as I thought, to her I begged her to forgive me; I vowed that I would never again give her cause to reproach me, or to fear such insults from me again; that I would ever and always guard her virtue and honor as dearly as my own; that I would ever honor and love her as a dear, dear friend, a brother, and as the wife of another man, who had also been my friend and comrade. Well—Edna, I cannot yet understand it, perhaps because I am not a woman—you might be better able to account for the transformation that took place in my sweet and gentle Mysia. She rose in terrible fury and denounced me in the most passionate language; accusing me of having won her love and then cast it in her face as worthless. Much, much more besides, too, that astounded me and made me feel what a scoundrel I must appear in her sight. I did not answer when she spoke thus till at the very last she burst into tears and cried with a wail in her voice that went like a stab to my heart—I think I hear it now, Edna—'Roger, Roger, I love you, I love you, and I shall love you till I die!' Then she fled from my presence and those were the last words I heard and I never looked on her face again till just now." Roger's voice failed him for a moment, then he whispered, or rather moaned, "Oh! Edna, Edna, she went to her death, and I feel as though I were her murderer!"

A gentle pressure of the hand that held hers was Edna's only immediate recognition that she had heard all he had said, and also understood and sympathized with him in his great grief.

Presently when Roger grew calmer, Edna withdrew her hand from his and reaching over gently lifted

the coverings from the face of the sleeping Mysia revealing those features so still in death. On the lips was a half smile and the face wore an expression of resignation ; even the cheeks had that touch of innocent maidenhood that had been her greatest charm for Roger Northbrook when he first knew and loved her. There was nothing repulsive or disfiguring there, the ravages of the fire had left the fair face untouched : protected as it was by the broad breast of the man who as her husband had never shielded her from the fierce storms and fires of temptation in life !

“ Look ! Roger,” whispered Edna, “ see, she smiles upon you still. She hears your confession and knows your keen remorse, she forgives fully, freely, as she would be forgiven. Let your love for her be consecrated for ever. Let it remain as a shrine in your heart where holy thoughts like fair angels shall ever minister to this sweet soul ; and thus aid it in its ascent to higher, fairer spheres, where we both hope to meet it in the bright eternity that is now opening to our view. Roger, my friend, take comfort, Mysia is not dead, but sleepeth the sleep of her soul, to rise to live again a holier, purer life. Now you can in truth and purity kiss this little sister good-night, till the resurrection morning ! ”

While Edna had been speaking the stricken man bowed his head against Edna's arm and for a few moments could not look upon the face she had uncovered to his view. But Edna now placed her arm around him and helped him to stand upon his strong leg, while the other injured limb still rested upon the chair, and thus supporting him, side by side they gazed down upon the face of Mysia for the last time : Roger, upon his little first love ; Edna, upon her who had taken her place as wife to the only man she had loved with a human affection. What was passing through their minds and filling their hearts, only the God that dwelt within their own souls knew. After a silence of a few seconds, Roger stooped and gently kissed the marble brow of Mysia, and as he did so

several big tears fell upon her cold cheek. Edna left them there when she covered her face again and herself laid a kiss upon the folded hands that were crossed upon her bosom. She felt it would be sacrilege for her even to touch the spot where his lips had last rested, knowing how he had loved her. Before she replaced the face cloth Edna whispered gently:

"Mysia, little sister, sleep on and take your rest now, by the side of him who is your repentant husband and the father of your little son. Have no fear for the welfare of your child: I will be a mother to him and in the strength of the Lord, in the name of His Christ, I solemnly promise you that I shall faithfully fulfil the trust that has been given into my hands by our Heavenly Father. Farewell! God's peace enfolds you for ever."

Then Edna covered the face and helped Roger back to his seat, where he sat silent, too overcome to speak. Leaving him seated, with bowed head and covered eyes, Edna passed round to the other side and stood now beside the second coffin. But it was a few moments before she could summon sufficient courage to lift the veil that shrouded those well-known features. Only God knew what were the woman's feelings then. Eventually she triumphed over her momentary weakness and looked for the last time upon the face of him who had once been all the best the world held for her. The face that she thought expressed all the grandest, noblest qualities of manhood; and to her then simple and unsophisticated mind was the handsomest and most princely countenance that ever graced the form of a man. But since then Edna, like many of her sex, had learned other lessons from bitterest experience. Though her fingers trembled as they held the cloth, she gazed long and earnestly upon those features—now so changed by the hand of Time and altered by the storms of passion and dissipation, angry rebellion and perchance the blighting yet cleansing fires of a keen remorse. But still Edna traced the resemblance to what she had once loved; and while she looked she in

memory lived over again a lifetime of suffering. In rapid review she saw all that bitter, humiliating past, and saw herself as another being passing through the experiences which it included. No, *that girl* who had stood by *his* side then was not herself as she knew herself *now*. She had died to that old self when she rose from that bed of sickness a changed woman. "Yes, yes," she mused, "there are other and worse forms of death than you now know, Eugene! There was a death which I passed through when I left you for ever, that is worse than the death of the body—it is the death of faith, hope and love—when these are gone, what then is left for the woman who is a wife? What, did I say? Ah! surely much, very much, if the loss of all earthly love but brings her into the arms of Christ—teaches her what a grand, a soul-satisfying thing is the love of God! Yes," she murmured in a half whisper, "yes, I can thank and bless you now, Eugene, since the experiences I gained through you have led me to the point where I as a soul stand to-day. Stand, conscious of my own divinity, and purified, cleansed by the fires of suffering and sore affliction, even at your hands: only the instrument in the hands of the Father to mould me to His whole Will. I am now made able to help my suffering sisters; to be a strong lover of my sex, and to press onward, upward in my soul journey till I shall awake in His likeness and be forever satisfied!"

Roger Northbrook during the last part of her sentence had raised his head and fixed his eyes upon Edna's countenance; but she saw him not, for her eyes were bent upon the face of the man who had been his early friend and whose life-cords had been so strangely interwoven with his own, and still seemed to be linked together in a mystic way that was as yet inexplicable to himself. No tears were falling from Edna's eyes, but she was evidently taking her last farewell of the form that had once been the dearest on earth to her. Why did a pang shoot through the heart of the man as he watched her stoop and with her

soft red lips touch Reginald Vernon's cold brow? Why did he turn away his head till she had replaced the face covering, and look not again till she was standing once more by his side, and with her hand again resting on his shoulder, with that attitude of perfect trust and comradeship, saying:—

“Roger, I will leave you now. I hear the others coming to hold the service. I will return when they are gathered and join them. You will also remain, I hope. God's strength will uphold you, my dear and honored friend, during those last rites. His peace enfolds them and you also, and I, Roger, you know that my love I give unto you, my peace I bestow upon you now, henceforth, and throughout all time.”

Before he could do more than lay his lips to the hand that rested so lightly on his shoulder, Edna was gone. And as she opened the conservatory door and let in a flood of light, the bird, which had escaped from Reggie's hand and had perched in a corner of the partially darkened room, now fluttered from its resting place and in its fright settled on Roger's shoulder. He took it as a symbol of the white dove of peace which she had left with him as her blessing!

CHAPTER XXX.

THE MYSTIC VOICE.

“When once the sense of separateness is removed, then the greatest obstacle in the path of Power is gone. Man can rebuild his physical nature and create his divine nature out of it, only when he knows that neither it, nor the animating power within, are his own—or are even himself. When he learns this lesson fully, the heart dies out so far as personal desire is concerned, and the ashes of longing lie in the vessel of the offering.”

—ESOTERIC WISDOM.

Three months have passed since the eventful scenes which marked that never-to-be-forgotten Christmas time at “Cumbooquepa” Station. Changes have taken place all round, and a general dispersion consequent upon the destruction of the homestead was inevitable. Roger Northbrook had been taken by his

cousin Mr. Carlyon to his own home at Mosman's Bay, there to be nursed till the fractured leg was strong enough to use again.

The Reverend Cyril Clifford had taken up his duties in his new sphere of labor, and was already quite at home among his parishioners, and was a general favorite, more especially among the younger members of the congregation; for the young English curate seemed to have established a feeling of comradeship and real brotherhood among the young men of the church, which was quite unusual, especially in such an exclusive set as were those who attended St. John's. Cyril Clifford had learned a great deal more of Australian life and manners, and consequently had a better estimate of the class and character of the people, than have most new arrivals. This was largely due to the experiences he had passed through during his visit to "Cumbooquepa," and the trying ordeal which had marked as a red-letter day for him his first Christmas Day in Australia. Whatever his estimate was of the majority of those with whom he was brought into contact, during his work among the so-called élite (whose half-and-half lives would never have given him a fair example of the Australians in Australia), it is very certain that the Rev. Cyril had his opinion about the real merits of the colonials largely redeemed by what he had seen and known of the families at "Cumbooquepa" and "Warrimoo." Here he had been an eye-witness of what terrible disasters and incalculable losses have to be endured by the pioneers of a new country in the effort to redeem the virgin land from her native wildness; to evolve from those vast solitudes a fair and flourishing landscape, dotted with large herds of sheep and cattle and covered with rich pasturage and abundant crops of golden grain. Yet, at what a cost is this effected, even at the present time, for not till taught, by such dire experiences as those which the country had just passed through, the great necessity of water conservation, will these disastrous droughts and consequent bush fires be wholly overcome. Yet,

like everything else in life, the few of to-day must suffer for the good of the many of to-morrow ; therefore humanity is continuously sacrificing upon the altar of life for the salvation and good of its fellows ; this then really constitutes every earnest and unselfish worker a very saviour of his race.

Mr. George Esbourne had rented a very fine furnished residence at Manly (that beautiful and most popular watering place, known as " the Brighton of New South Wales "), where he installed the family for three months, till they should have time to get things at " Cumbooquepa " in order and a new homestead built. Here Mrs. Esbourne, Edna, Gracie, and Frank were joined by Ella, who had been staying with the Godfreys at Potts' Point during the time of the disaster. The tender-hearted though thoughtless girl was much affected by the awful catastrophe which had overwhelmed them all ; more especially did she grieve over the lamentable death of Nurse Mysia, and the strange revelations attending that event, feeling, as she did, that she to a great extent was to blame for the whole affair. Edna comforted her on this point, asserting that there was a higher power than their own working out the destiny that had overtaken the two victims, and it was for them to now seek the ever-present good out of what appeared as evil.

That was a very quiet New Year for all. Mr. Esbourne could only remain with them for the first few days of January, as he with Leonard had to return to the station to superintend the arrangements about the insurances, and the immense amount of work entailed in getting the stock mustered and tallied again. Frank stayed in Sydney and entered the office of a leading barrister to prepare for his chosen profession as a solicitor. While the family remained at Manly, Frank went up to the city daily, but as soon as the homestead was ready for occupation again, and the family would return there, a home would have to be secured for him in Sydney. Mrs. Esbourne did not like the idea of her youngest son being left in the city

without some of his own family with him to attend his comforts. She had a mortal horror of the fashionable city boarding houses, for Cyril Clifford had already had some experience of such, and his accounts were none too enticing to the anxious mother, who felt the responsibility of exposing her son, who had so much time on his hands, to the numerous temptations of life in a gay city. Certainly, Frank was no boy now, being in his twenty-second year, but a mother seldom admits that her children are grown up and able to do without her care and guidance. This then was a point of discussion between herself and Edna, who at once proposed that she should remain in Sydney and procure a house somewhere near town, where she could have Frank and Grace with her, since it was noticed that the change to the sea coast had been most beneficial to the little invalid.

To this plan Mrs. Esbourne gladly consented, much to Edna's delight, as she was herself most desirous of getting into touch with new and different phases of life so as she might be able to test her own spiritual strength and perhaps develop her healing powers. Then again she had another little charge to keep: one which she cherished very dearly, and had accepted with a grateful heart; this was little Reggie Vernon, who was now Edna's "own little boy," as he styled himself, and called her his "Mama Edna."

After the shock of the fire, Gracie had relapsed into her customary weak and helpless state and had not again attempted to put her feet to the ground. Edna therefore devoted all her time to her sister and did not give up hope of an ultimate cure, nor did she relax her daily affirmations for the strength and perfection she desired to see expressed in Gracie's body. Gradually she would encourage the invalid to sit up alone for a few minutes each day, while she was realizing the power of the Infinite Life and Strength to support that frail form and restore it to robust health. From this she was by degrees able to get Gracie to her feet and with her aid teach her to take a few steps across

the room. This was done at first with considerable pain to the young girl, but she was too brave and trusting to complain, and steadily persevered in her endeavors, through faith and knowledge, to remove this mountain of disability under which she labored. She thus gave Edna every encouragement to go on and help her build up the depleted parts and gradually strengthen the relaxed sinews, and renew the flabby muscles of her long disused limbs. Then Gracie would try sitting on the different chairs till she got accustomed to moving all the parts of her body in numerous ways, and though these exertions seemed to occasion her a new sort of pain for every fresh movement she made, yet she fully recognised that it was only by continued practice, perseverance and endurance that she would regain what she had for so many years lost.

The experience which Gracie had had on the day of the fire, when she, unaided, had taken those few steps, was a wonderful encouragement to her. She felt that it was not impossible for her to walk alone: it was really only strength through practice in the use of her limbs and movement of the spine that was requisite to her ultimate recovery of the long-lost power of locomotion. Thus day by day the two sisters continued to devote their earnest efforts to this great work, and they were eventually rewarded by seeing Gracie rise one day and walk across the room unassisted. That revelation was the most joyous hour of Edna's life, and she gave heartfelt thanks to the Spirit of Life and Love that her prayers had been so far answered. It was now only a matter of time till full strength should be gained and Gracie would be able to increase the distances. And indeed according to their faith was it unto them. At the end of the three months Edna had the satisfaction of seeing her well-loved sister able to walk slowly through the house and upon the verandahs, and even with a little assistance from herself or Cyril—who was ever hovering near when visiting at the house—Gracie was able to get out into the garden, where she would spend hours upon the

lawn during the fine warm days among the other members of the family, the centre figure of a happy rejoicing family group, glad to have her among them after many days ; a very monument to the power of faith, prayer and knowledge as expressed by the Spirit of Truth.

It was a fine warm afternoon late in March. Easter was approaching and the stay of the Esbournes at "Clovelly" (as their waterside residence was called) was now but short. The new homestead was nearing completion and would soon be ready for occupancy. Edna and Gracie were seated on the lawn of the upper terrace, just beside a marble statue of Joan of Arc, where their garden chairs and afternoon tea table were grouped. Gracie's slender fingers were busy with some fancy work, while Edna had been reading to her from a book which she had found in the library attached to the little study of which the house so proudly boasted, and which she had appropriated as her own particular sanctum. The books that Roger Northbrook had brought with him from America and most of which she had not had time to read, were all burnt when the homestead was destroyed. Edna had lamented this loss sorely, and especially the prized volume of Prentice Mulford, from which she had caught her first glimpse of the light. When he heard her lament their loss, Roger had promised they should be replaced, and he had written at once to New York and ordered a fresh supply of the volumes, as well as any others more recently published by the New Thought writers, and which they had not previously received. Edna and Gracie were eagerly looking forward to the arrival of these much-prized books and hoped soon to have the privilege of delving deeper into the mysteries of the Science of Life as revealed by the great souls of these latter days : the days of illumination from on high. Edna had been fortunate in saving her small box of treasures containing papers of value to herself and her various manuscripts and jettters, as well as her "brain book," as she termed the

book in which she recorded her ideas and impressions. The book she had found in the library was one that treated upon spiritualism. On finishing it that afternoon they discussed its claims to credence. Edna, from her point of view, did not agree with its statements, but on Gracie stating that she was very much interested in the various phenomena there related, Edna had told her sister about an article she had written and called "Controlled," upon which Gracie had begged Edna to get her book and read it to her. With this request Edna complied and when the article was finished Gracie remarked :

"Now I may tell you, Edna, why I am particularly interested in the phenomena as described in that book we have just finished. After hearing that remarkable article from your own pen I think you will understand and help me to account for what I have heard."

"What was that, Gracie?" asked Edna.

"Well, do you know that I have been hearing voices lately."

"Have been hearing voices?" echoed Edna.

"What do you mean, dear? What sort of voices?"

"Spirit voices."

"Oh! I think it is only the impression left upon your mind by the vivid scenes described in that book of Florence Marryatt's. I ought not to have read it to you; you know you are such a very imaginative little mortal and might easily have fancied you heard a voice when it was really your own soul within you echoing your thoughts," said Edna, smiling.

"Then my soul is wiser than I knew it was, if you are correct," protested Gracie.

"Of course, dear, all souls are wiser than they are aware, since each and every soul in the universal creation has within itself the essence of all the wisdom of the universe. It is an expression of God the Infinite Wisdom and must therefore partake of the Nature of its Source. It has only to unfold the perfection inherent within itself by growth gained through

experience. In the same manner as every child that goes to school has all the capacity to acquire knowledge within itself, the educational system but brings out these capabilities and reveals its inherent powers. A soul is as old as the flesh-form it dwells in for a season is but inheritor of a few years of time. But what said your voices, Gracie ? ”

“ It was not many voices, but only one voice I heard,” replied Grace. “ It came to me when I was thinking over what you had been saying yesterday about our not needing to bother ourselves over spirits that had passed on ; but that we should seek and receive all our instruction from the One Omnipresent and Infinite Spirit, the Lord of all Spirits ; the Spirit which Job said was in man and giveth him understanding. Then the thought came to me that just as we may learn from the thoughts of a man expressed in a book when we have never even seen the form of the writer, why is it not possible for us to gain spiritual knowledge from those who have passed on into spirit life, if we will but open our spiritual ears to hear their voices in the same way as I opened my ears just now to hear you read those thoughts of yours ? ”

“ Very ably argued, Gracie,” allowed Edna, looking intently at the puckered brow of her young sister, and deeply interested in the trend of her thought. “ Well, dear, and what conclusion did you arrive at ? ”

“ I do not think I had time to arrive at a conscious conclusion myself,” rejoined the girl, looking up and meeting her sister’s inquiring gaze. “ But, Edna, I got the answer very clearly and in words that have been ringing in my ears all day.”

“ What were they, dear ? Was it anything you can repeat to me ? ”

“ Yes, I think I can tell you pretty nearly the whole message, perhaps not exactly word for word, though the full meaning is correct. I wrote it down this morning, so as I may never forget again. Then folding her hands over her work, while her eyes rested on the dancing blue waters of the harbor, which lay

before them bathed in the long slanting rays of the afternoon sun, Gracie said softly :

“ It was just after I had gone to bed last night, and lay as I told you, thinking about what you said after you had given me my treatment, when suddenly a voice in the room said quite distinctly “ Good-night ! ” I thought it must be you who had come back, but I saw no one, and the voice was not yours, but I answered quite involuntarily, “ Good-night ! ” The voice repeated the word and I then raised my head to see who could be in the room, but there was not anybody. I did not speak again but lay still, wondering could it be my fancy or was it really a visitor from the spirit land we had been speaking about. I was not, however, left long in doubt, for almost immediately a very sweet voice said in clear tones and quite distinctly these words :

“ Dear little sister, you make a mistake in shutting your spirit friends out of your daily life ; they are the angels you entertain unawares. You do not realize how very much those who are gone over to a higher plane are to-day helping the world to see and grasp this great Truth hidden by the dust of Ignorance. You below, sow the seed truly, like Paul, but we are they who like Apollos watereth, and God, the Spirit and Father of all spirits, giveth the increase. You of yourselves can do nothing. It is the strong, true, earnest and great spirits who are gone before who are really the saviours of this generation. I beg of you both, indeed all earnest seeking souls, not to despise the visits of your spirit-friends ; they are God’s angels and you need them so much at present. The world is saved only by the love of those whom you all have loved, and who have loved you. You know it is said, ‘ Draw near unto God, and He will draw nigh unto you.’ Well, in the same manner is it your privilege to call us to your side. We cannot come if you do not ask us, or if you refuse to believe in or receive us. You have free will in this respect as in all other matters concerning the welfare of the soul. Dear ones—beloved,

—I speak to you thus for your good and for your enlightenment, because I know you are both seeking greater light, and if you will accept our help we will come often to you and tell you of these things. But we ask and believe that you will never seek us for trivial matters, only for the great affairs of life : that which has to do with the soul's good. Do not think that we are in far-away worlds beyond sight and hearing, I want to tell you now that we—the great Spirit Band—are *not anywhere else* but in this world with you just as much as we ever were when in the body : only that we are invisible to the eyes of most mortals. We are the atmosphere—or cloud—of witnesses ; the elements of Purity, Hope, Faith and Goodness that is steadily purifying and cleansing the world of its belief in evil. We are just as much here now and always as is Jesus the Messiah, who never left the earth any more than we have done. Other worlds there may be in this vast Universe of Spirit, but we—and many hosts of your great and noble ones who lived their earth lives among you and passed out of your sight long ago—do not know of any other but this one where we all lived and loved, and gained our lessons by experience. This is the world our Jesus—God's Christ, the well-beloved Son—came to save ; and it is the only world for the spirits of His many brethren : the only world we know of for soul-development. Dear sisters, God is in the world ; Christ Jesus is in the world. We, every one of us, are in the world, only waiting to be seen and recognised by you all when you will open your spiritual eyes to our presence. This is possible to every soul if they will but seek to do so in earnestness and sincerity. Peace be with thee. Good-night ! ”

“ That was all, then the voice faded away gently with another whispered ‘ good-night,’ and silence fell upon me,” concluded Gracie.

Breathlessly Edna had listened to what her sister said and when she ceased speaking Edna could hardly quite realize whether she had not also been hearing the

voice herself, or was merely following her words. She was deeply impressed with the substance of the message and the forceful way in which it was delivered, as well as the truths it was meant to convey, not alone to Grace, but evidently to herself also, for two had been spoken of by the voice. At length Edna, laying her hand upon those of the young girl, which were folded in her lap, her eyes calmly resting on the distant scene with a far away look as if listening still to the mystic voice, breathed :

" Oh ! Gracie, what a wonderful message ! Why did you not tell me about it this morning ? "

" I could not, Edna," she replied gently, resuming her work, " I was not sure of myself till I thought over it, and really I confess I have done little else all day, it seemed to fascinate me by its strange mode of delivery and the wonderful light that it shed upon the subject I was in such doubt about. I daresay I should not even now have spoken of it to you had you not read me your own strange message." Then she added wistfully, " Edna, don't you think that this will account for my visions ? "

" Probably it would, dear," assented Edna. " Yet I am still at a loss to know how the voice reached your ears so plainly. You have never heard voices before ? You know Joan of Arc there (pointing to the statue beside them as she spoke) " always said she heard voices that bade her do what she did to save France. But you have only seemed to see things by your mental vision ? Is that not so, dear ? " suggested Edna.

" Yes, y-e-s ! " admitted Grace hesitatingly, " or at least I am not aware that I ever distinctly heard a voice before as I know I did last night. But then it might be because I was more certain about my subjects on past occasions. Then as the ideas were chiefly for my poems I used to fancy they were the echoes ringing in my ears of what I was trying to say. This, though, was quite different, Edna, because you know I was ignorant about spirit messages and I could not have

thought all that out by myself so clearly as to be able to repeat it to you as I have just done. I am quite sure it came from an unseen source just to answer my many doubts and questions on this subject, as was stated by my messenger. However, I mean to believe that it is so, and to do as it instructed me, and then perhaps it will come again and tell me more and I shall be absolutely certain. I was so awe-stricken last night that I could not find my voice to speak a word except that first 'good-night,' although I wanted to say ever so much," said the girl regretfully.

Before Edna could make reply to Grace's last remarks the maid appeared with the afternoon tea, which was served on the lawn when the days were mild and they were all gathered there. Mrs. Esbourne followed immediately and joined the group, together with Ella, accompanied by Amy Godfrey, who was spending these last days with them before they took their departure for home. Thus the conversation was interrupted and no more was said upon the mystery of the voice till later. The merry chatter of the other two girls chased the perplexed look from Gracie's face and the pucker from her brow, and substituted smiles and laughter instead, which were certainly more becoming to a lovely young maiden such as Grace Esbourne had recently developed into; a fair and delicate lily among the roses, she seemed, beside the vivacious Ella and mischievous Amy.

Just then there was a shout from the water's edge and looking down to the landing stage they saw the rowing boat draw up, with Frank, accompanied by Victor Barcombe and the Rev. Cyril Clifford, all of whom had arrived to spend the Easter holidays with the Esbournes at "Clovelly." They had met Frank at the Manly wharf after he left his city office, and accompanied him down by the same steamer. As it was a moderate walk from the pier to the house, he generally pulled over the bay in the morning and left the boat there ready to return that same way at evening. So it happened that the last Manly boat

had arrived while Edna and Gracie had been so earnestly engrossed in their subject, and they had failed to notice the boys waving, for which they roundly rated them, avowing they had almost waved their arms off to attract their attention, but unavailingly. Ella and Amy rushed down to meet the visitors, who presently joined the group on the lawn and received their cups of tea from Edna's hands, amid much general talk and bright repartee.

Cyril took his seat by Gracie's side, the one recently vacated by Edna, and the most uninitiated observer did not need to look twice to discover that there the young clergyman found all the paradise he desired at that period of his existence, for his whole being seemed alive with a great joy which flooded him when in this fair girl's presence. There was a strange affinity between these two that drew them together involuntarily, and though they might not be conversing it was sufficient happiness to each to know that they were near one another. The first delight of Cyril's life was to see Gracie if only for a few minutes, and the second joy was the knowledge that she too was pleased to see him. His heart was filled with a great thankfulness at the wonderful cure that had been effected; and he always cherished the secret belief that he had been instrumental in helping it forward. Now her sure and steady progress to entire health and strength was a source of real gratification. This great miracle alone made Cyril most lenient towards what he had always considered was heresy on the part of Miss Esbourne and her peculiar and to him rather fanatical beliefs. Though he never now invited discussions, he was always most willing to listen to her when she would talk to him on her pet subjects though lately he found that she was not so much inclined to expound her new doctrines as when he first knew her. He did not know that when one gets a firmer grasp upon a thing and knows it is theirs, they do not make such a fuss about the holding of it as is

the case when they first clutch it and are scarcely certain they can retain their grip upon it.

No, Edna did not now expound New Thought theories in and out of season. But she lived and acted up to its principles in her life and that too in such a way as made it more convincing than if she preached to her listeners by the hour, as we know she was apt to do when she first took the Science of Being into her mental kingdom and understood its wonderful power. Now that it had got into the kingdom of her soul, she was content to wait the development of each soul, knowing that when it had a spiritual hunger upon it then it would seek food to satisfy that hunger. She had faithfully sown the seed that was given her; now it was her work to wait patiently till it took root, then it might be her privilege to tend and water it, until it should bring forth fruit of itself.

"Mother, the boys want to take us for a row before dinner. We may go, may we not?" cried Ella as they finished their tea and were scattered upon the terraces talking and laughing.

"Yes, I suppose there is nothing to object to, so long as you will be sure and get back before dark," assented Mrs. Esbourne. "How many of you are going?" she enquired.

"Oh! as many as will come, or at least as the boat will hold," answered Ella, as she ran into the house to get her hat. Then returning she cried, "Are you coming, too, Cyril?"

"As if you need ask that question!" retorted Amy Godfrey, laughingly, before Cyril could reply. "We all know now where he prefers to spend his time. Gracie, you little witch, you are a dangerous magnet now you're in the lists. I'm thinking we'll have to look alive or you'll be cutting us out all round," she said teasingly.

"Indeed, we're only too proud and pleased to have such a rival as Gracie!" cried Ella, as she ran up to her sister, who sat by Cyril's side, blushing at Amy's saucy remark, and threw her arms around her

impulsively, saying, "Never mind our chaff, darling, we are all so overjoyed to see you with us, and it will not be long now before you will be able to join in all our amusements—won't she, Cyril?"

"Indeed I have not the least doubt about it," replied the young man, with a mischievous look at the merry girlish face that was smiling at him as she bent over Gracie, "though," he added, "I do not think our Golden Locks will ever get up to such desperate pranks as her brown-haired sister!"

"Thanks for your very frank opinion of her 'brown-haired sister,' as you are good enough to term me, for there's no mistaking the description—you *know* I have no rival in our family."

"No, indeed you have not," he laughed merrily.

"Well, don't you forget, sir, that people who say daring things are likely to get the retort from desperate people," she cried, with mock indignation, then, bending down, she whispered meaningly, "I have seen golden locks elsewhere than on a fair maiden's head, remember!"

Before Cyril could catch her and punish her for her mischievous reminder of his "golden mascotte" which she had accidentally discovered one day, the girl swiftly darted down the slope out of his reach and across the flat to the boat shed, where the boys were awaiting her and Amy, calling impatiently to them both to "hurry up!"

Then there was a shout from the front steps of the house and a shrill little voice cried excitedly, "Mama Edna! Mama Edna! I want to go in the boat, too, I do!"

Edna Esbourne looked up and saw little Reggie Vernon descending the steps, holding on to Roger Northbrook's hand. As he reached the lawn he broke away from Roger's detaining clasp and, rushing into Edna's arms, kissed her effusively and in a desperate hurry, as he begged, "Please, Mama Edna, say I can go in the boat. Quick! see, they will go without me!" urged the boy.

Edna had given her hand to Roger in greeting while the child was speaking and tugging at her dress to win her reply and coveted permission. Smiling at his eagerness, she looked down at his bright up-turned face and said: "Yes, Reggie, of course you may go in the boat if they will take you. But you have not even said whether you are glad to see me again after being away!"

"I am glad, I am, Mama Edna. You ask Uncle Roger; but I do want to go in the boat," persisted the boy, anxiously watching the group at the landing stage. Edna signalled and asked them would they take Reggie with them, to which they willingly consented, for the little chap was a general favorite with them all. Amy Godfrey ran up the steps to receive him from Edna, after which she returned to Roger, saying, as he walked across to greet Mrs. Esbourne and the other two on the terrace, "When did you arrive? The boys did not mention that they had seen you on the 4 o'clock boat."

"No, I got down much earlier, but happened to meet an old friend on board, and we took a stroll along the Corso and on to the Main Beach. We chatted, while Reggie raced on the sands. Then after leaving him I came on here to you, a little late I admit, but I dare to hope none the less welcome." Edna answered with a smile, and then as he reached the group he shook hands all round, remarking how wonderfully improved Gracie was and how well and rosy she was getting.

"Yes, she is making a wonderful recovery," admitted Mrs. Esbourne, "it quite compensates us for all our losses and the trouble that drove us down here."

"Hers is indeed a wonderful case and one that does your faith great credit, Edna," he observed.

"Yes, thanks to the Spirit of Health and Love! she is indeed a joy and a blessing, I admit," said Edna quietly. "But now, you have not told us about yourself. How is your leg progressing? You know I am waiting to see you discard that stick next," she

remarked, pointing to the thick walking-stick he leaned upon when walking. "Do not forget that I am daily seeing that leg quite strong, in the same way as I do Gracie's spine," she smiled.

"Ah! I fear you have the best of me there, Edna," he answered, seating himself beside her, while Mrs. Esbourne left them to respond to a summons from the house. "I believe and I think thoroughly understand all that you tell me of the possibilities that are mine for appropriation in this mental healing; but somehow I do not seem to be able to put them into practice yet. I want some of your faith and more of your patient perseverance," he said.

"That will come in time, Roger, and I quite understand the difficulties which a man like yourself would have in letting go of all your old fixed ideas upon these subjects; especially when it involves your taking up such a chimera as this power of the mind over matter appears to so many to be," responded Edna gravely. "Yet, Roger, you must admit that you are much better and stronger in every way since you followed Gracie's example and did away with your crutches, relying only upon your own hidden reserves of strength and will-power to take their place. You say yourself that the leg has got more flexible and that the circulation is being more fully restored than was previously the case, do you not?" she questioned, looking up at him anxiously.

"Most assuredly that is so. I am indeed altogether a new man this last month since your first visit and the beginning of your treatments. I am sure I have steadily improved. But—but then, you know, with such a physician as yourself how could it well be otherwise," he added, smiling.

Then the conversation became general between the four left on the lawn and questions were asked and answered regarding the doings of all since Roger had last driven round by the Spit to visit them at "Clovelly." Mrs. Esbourne, who returned to say that she was going out for half an hour, enquired how Reggie

had behaved himself while on his visit to Mrs. Carlyon's. "Was he pleased to be with the children?" she asked.

"Yes, he was all right; yet I think the young rascal was glad to get back again. This morning when he knew he was coming home to his 'Mama Edna' he was so excited that he would hardly eat his luncheon," Roger announced, laughing.

"Yes, and then when he did come he scarcely waited to kiss me before he was wanting to be away with the others in the boat," Edna rejoined smilingly.

"Childlike, of course," observed Mrs. Esbourne. "The new pleasure took his fancy," she remarked, as she stood waving her hand to the little party in the boat on the bay, on which the long slanting rays of the setting sun shone brightly and caused the spray from their oars to glisten like diamonds.

"Can you not see a wonderful improvement in Reggie, mother, since he came down here?" asked Edna.

"Yes, I do. He seems to have become quite a little man and has lost all his baby ways and speaks his words very clearly, too," rejoined Mrs. Esbourne.

"Yes," interposed Roger, "we all noticed it and my cousin was quite surprised at his marked intelligence for his age. I think it is due to mixing with others who do not treat him as a baby. His 'Granny Connors' never could forget he was her 'wee bairn.'"

"Does he ever speak of his mother to you?" asked Mrs. Esbourne.

"No. I doubt if he misses either her or his Granny Connors even. Since the poor old lady died so suddenly he seems to think it is the right thing for people to die. Nor does he ever talk about his 'own mama,' as he distinguishes his two mothers, and if he chances to mention her to me at all it is always with that quiet childlike philosophy which is such a marked characteristic of Reggie's. He told me the other day that God took his own mama away and then got sorry because He knew that Reggie would be lonely, so he gave him his 'Mama Edna' instead. I asked him if

he loved his new mama that God had chosen for him, and in his own peculiar way he answered by saying he would show me how much he loved her. When I allowed him to do so, I got such a veritable 'bear's hug' that I didn't require any further proof," announced Roger humorously.

There was a general laugh at this, and Mrs. Esbourne admitted that she had received a sample of Reggie's hugs, and Gracie stated that she too had been treated to some, but she thought they were even toned down a bit on her account.

Mrs. Esbourne, accompanied by Roger and Edna, then went indoors, and Gracie and Cyril were left to follow. The young clergyman tenderly assisted the frail girl as she walked across the garden and up the steps into the little study, where she rested upon the couch after the long afternoon sitting out upon the lawn.

Cyril was turning over the books which were scattered upon the table and remarking upon the advanced views which some of the New Thought writers adopted and the style of language they used in speaking of what was known to theologians as "God."

"But Cyril, don't you think it is all very beautiful and most wonderfully satisfying to the soul?" asked Gracie.

"Yes, I admit it is very new and strange, but I must say candidly that I cannot yet follow their arguments: they are very deep and in some cases vague. Now, I admit I much prefer to listen to Edna talking. Some of the things she says afford me food for thought and reflection," he stated.

"That is good, Cyril, for, as Edna says, 'Thoughts are vitalized forces.' Then new thought is greater force, and that is the first real help to progress. I know that when I listen to Edna explain a thing, it always helps me to find out something new for myself. Her words seem to stir up something inside my own brain so that like when you rummage through a box of

treasures you often find the very thing you want, though you did not know that it was there," said Gracie, smiling at him from her soft blue eyes.

"Well you are a box of treasures yourself, little one, for I know I am daily finding rare gems hidden away in that curly head," he answered, as he toyed with one of her long fair ringlets that strayed across the crimson velvet cushion of the couch, and lay temptingly close to his fingers.

"Cyril, if you begin to sink to the level of common platitudes I shall think that my gift of intuition which tells me whom I like and whom I should *not* like, has played me false ; in fact, that you are just an ordinary being and not Cyril as I know him—or, or thought I did."

"Stop, stop ! Gracie, I beg !" he cried, placing his fingers upon her laughing lips. "Say you will forgive me and I promise never again to transgress. Quick ! say you do," he urged. "Here comes Edna."

"Yes, you are forgiven," she said, smiling roguishly at him as he bent over her and looked entreatingly into her face.

"I was not greatly in fault," he pleaded.

"No, I know it was not serious," she admitted, "but I was just taking due precautions for the future."

"Sufficient for the day, Gracie, remember," he quoted, and, picking up a book from the table, he bent his face over the pages which lay open before him as Edna entered the room, and said, "Listen to this, Miss Edna," and then began to read from the page these words :

"Life and intelligence are not inherent attributes of matter, else man could by some co-relation or arrangement of material elements bring forth a manifestation in some form, be it ever so crude. But man cannot discover the life inherent in protoplasm, which is the simplest known form that life is revealed in, or manifest."

"What do you think of that statement ?" Cyril asked, looking into her face enquiringly. "It reminds

me of the latest investigations which have recently been made by scientists. When I was at college we read of a professor in Germany experimenting in his efforts to create life out of various elements. I forget now the details of the investigation, but if I remember rightly it failed," he remarked.

"Yes, I think I read or heard something of what you refer to, Cyril," returned Edna. "And though," she added reflectively, "at present probably it is not possible in man's incomplete state of development, yet I dare to believe that all the same it is but a matter of time when it will be effected, for God in Man will some day discover it to Himself through or by means of His (God's) only known medium for obtaining knowledge, and that medium is Man. God, working through man—His expression of His perfect idea—though not yet complete in manifestation must reveal to Himself all that He was or is, or is to be, now or in the eternities to come. He must be able to consciously produce or create that which unconsciously produced or created Him and hence us, or that which is termed humanity. There is no way possible for God to reveal Himself to Himself except through MAN the Son; whether that Son be called by the name of Adam, or Jesus, or Buddah, or any other mighty one, it is all the Christ, the Son of God, or God made manifest. The discoveries of science are God's revelations of Himself, through Himself, to Himself. Indeed, then, the sooner religion becomes wedded to science the quicker will that great revelation burst forth upon the eyes of the watching, waiting worlds; that, I consider, will be the ideal Universal Union."

"That would surely do away with man, or make man as great as God, would it not?" suggested Cyril, in rather shocked tones at the daringness of her last statement.

"Why will you wish to rob man of his true birthright? Why will you dishonor a God-Creator by giving Him 'worms of the dust' for sons and daughters?" she demanded indignantly.

"I do not knowingly dishonor God," protested Cyril, "I simply cannot soar as high as you appear to do in thought upon these subjects. I take the Bible statements for my guide."

"Yes, but when man is spoken of there it refers to man as an infant soul in spiritual consciousness. Man as flesh is as a worm, or the grass of the field: man as spirit is a spiritual being, a child of Infinite intelligence, wisdom, goodness and love; he inherits all these God-like attributes from the Supreme One who is his only Father, for Jesus Himself said, 'Call no man your father upon earth, for One is your Father, even God.' What could be plainer?" she questioned.

"Yes, I agree with you there," asserted Cyril, "but if man has all that you state as his attributes, would not that infer that wisdom and intelligence stood still and there was nothing more to acquire?"

"Not necessarily, since it would be but an unfolding of the inherent qualities of the Father revealed in the Son—Man. They are there now, but not yet made manifest in us as they were in Jesus the Christ. In like manner as the acorn contains the oak and when given conditions reveal it and by growth perfects it, so does every man contain the germ of Spirit which is always Christ the Son of God."

"Yet the sons of to-day are surely wiser, more intelligent and progressive than the fathers of a century ago, or even less? You admit this is the case. Does this not reveal an analogy with all nature as a procession of continuous improvement? In which case if the wisdom were there from the beginning why were our fathers not wiser than we?"

"Your question is a pertinent one, Cyril, but you must remember that though you had the capabilities to learn all you know to-day when you first went to school, yet it took those years of study and close application to evolve it and so allow you to express your inherent capabilities. Then again man is the child of Spirit and his generations as such are but equivalent to the years of the child of the flesh. One

expresses the individuality and is eternal ; the other reveals only the personality and is ephemeral."

"Then where is the progress for the spiritual in the individual, as for all else in creation, as you aver is the case?" he inquired.

"God, or Spirit, progresses by or in Man—His Child (or Son)—which is represented by the whole of the human race. This child, or mankind is Himself objectified, the unmanifest Spirit made manifest through flesh."

"Then am I to conclude from your argument that everything was as perfect, wise, intelligent, complete and whole in the beginning, before the creation of a manifest world, as it is now, or is ever likely to be in the end—presuming there ever shall be an end?" said the young man interrogatively.

"Yes, most assuredly, perfect, whole, complete *in essence*, but not manifest. In the bosom of the Father, but unrevealed: like the idea in your mind, but unexpressed. It must be obvious to you, and indeed to any thinker, that if a thing be good at all, it must be all that *good* includes, all that the word good infers from the beginning. In fact, it must be *that*, and only that in substance which the word good conveys to our mind in sound. Its essence must have inherent within it only that which will reveal the best, or *Only Good*." Edna paused for a moment, then said reflectively, "Now take, for example, gold. It is gold from the first and its purity and quality is inherent in itself; at no time, and by no process, yet discovered can this be added to. It is gold or *it is not* gold. There is no medium, though there may be degrees of quality. Anything made from that contains *that* within it; is composed of all the qualities and attributes that go to express what is known as the 'Queen of Metals'—gold. If the article made from that metal has mixed with it component parts of another or baser metal, it does not detract from the quality of the gold therein, only from the value and quality of the article.

I think you follow the analogy, do you not, Cyril?" she interjected here.

"Yes, perfectly, perfectly," he responded quickly.

"Proceed, please."

"Then as applied to God or Universal Spirit, it means that Spirit held within itself from the beginning all that will be manifested by it in the end, or revealed through matter or flesh, which is its highest form of expression, therefore God in the highest expression: or, to adhere to our first thought on this subject, man or spiritual consciousness expressed through flesh. This spiritual consciousness is the I AM in humanity. It is the I AM *that I am*, and that I AM is perfection on all planes—or the all-good. We must endeavor to get a fuller understanding of what we are in essence. 'Man, know thyself,' is the wisest advice ever given to the race, for there is really nothing else to know—nothing else worth knowing. That embraces *all*, for it is the *all* within the All," said Edna emphatically.

"What attitude then does God assume to man in the character of the Heavenly Father, as Jesus called Him?" asked Cyril.

"Jesus said, 'God is Spirit'—not, as incorrectly translated, '*a* Spirit'—and He also said, 'No man hath seen God at any time.' Yet again He said, 'He who hath seen Me hath seen the Father also.'"

"Put like that, it seems a contradiction, does it not?" suggested the young clergyman.

"Yes, I once thought so, too, till I analyzed it by this Light of Truth which has lately illumined my hitherto dark way," assented Edna. "But my guiding on that subject is this: that God being Spirit is pure Essence: is Being unmanifest—formless—unknown. Now when that which is spirit and formless takes shape or form, what would it be? What but the spirit manifest or a '*spiritual being*'; would it not?"

"Certainly that appears obvious," he admitted.

"Then as that which is spiritual must be seen to be known, it requires a vehicle through which to

express or reveal itself, and that is found in what we know as the highest form of matter—flesh. Thus you must discern that mankind is the vehicle in which this Spiritual Being rides or by which it is manifested. It is the God within the Man—the divine within the human ; or, to take perhaps a still better illustration and one which you will both understand—it is the Son of God within the Son of Man—that Only Son of Spirit lost in humanity, or flesh ; this is the lost one whom Jesus Christ came to seek and to save, and in Himself revealed."

"Your explanation is very clear and most instructive. Really, I feel as if it is more than I can digest at once, for it overthrows all my preconceived notions regarding these things, and though from my position as a clergyman I at times feel I should not even listen to them, sacred as they are, yet they have a strange fascination for me, and I begin to find myself turning them over in my mind continually when perhaps I should be thinking of other things," responded Cyril Clifford, in a half apologetic manner, yet not so much to Edna as to his own conscience did he seem to be speaking. Then he continued inquiringly, "But now I must ask you to enlighten me further. Throughout all this wonderful new Truth I am not clear on one point, and that is—Where is the Heavenly Father ? Can you make that clear to me ? "

"I will indeed," replied Edna quietly, "that is if I can find words in which to unfold to you this great mystery of God. The Spirit of Truth shows it to me thus: that, seeing God is Spirit, and God is the Creator, He must create something ere He can lay claim to that name. Now, as 'like begets like,' so Spirit creates only that which is like itself, spiritual. So that the spiritual part of that which is created (and we know it to be humanity, or mankind), I say, the spiritual part of humanity, is the Son of God."

"But that is Christ, is it not ? " contended Cyril.

"Yes and no," answered Edna. "But wait till I finish my idea, as it is a rather abstruse question to explain to a beginner, and one that requires careful

handling and thoughtful expression ; if you will not mind very much I would prefer to speak this to you with my eyes closed. I can then think better and seem to see more clearly the various points of my argument and not be so apt to lose any one of them." The two listeners assented willingly, and Edna Esbourne closed her eyes and sat back in her chair, with her hands laid on one another on the edge of the table, just as she had been speaking all along. Seated thus in a perfectly natural attitude, only with her eyelids closed, she continued to speak, while the other two in the room listened quietly with deep interest.

" Well, I think we have said that the spiritual part of humanity is the Son of God ; but this spiritual part of humanity is only seen through its expression, the natural, or what is known as the Son of Man. This Son of Man has been named ' Adam,' or the father of all flesh. Then in like manner as he is the father of the human or natural man, and is the medium through which the Spiritual Being expresses itself, so is that expressed Spiritual Being the Father of the Divine Man. It is the likeness within the image. Adam is the image, while the Lord God, or, as Jesus termed Him, ' the Heavenly Father,' is the likeness ; and it was this which Christ revealed through the body of Jesus."

" But I always thought that the likeness of God was Jesus Christ ? " interrupted Cyril.

" Yes, and most assuredly it is, else why did Jesus say ' I and My Father are One,' which means one and the same ? But do you not recognise that, as I said before, the generations of the flesh are but equivalent to days or years of spirit, ' A thousand years is but as a day to the Lord ' ? Adam, therefore, represents the infancy of the race, and as he is the vehicle of spirit he holds within him the essence of the Divine, and this indwelling Divinity is the Lord God or Heavenly Father of the Gospels. According as we become able to recognise Him within ourselves, dwelling in our own souls, ruling our lives and so enabling us to do His will, so also is He our Heavenly Father and we,

like our Elder Brother Jesus, can know Him and see Him and daily commune with Him, and at length become so perfectly able to do only His whole (or holy) will, that we too can say with Jesus, 'I and my Father are One.' "

"Then the Heavenly Father, in that aspect, is distinct from God?" suggested Cyril.

"Distinct, yes; yet not separate, for God is the Life of all life. He is the unmanifest till the Son, the offspring of the manifest, reveals Him: no more separate than a son can be from his earthly father. The son is because the father is, and one cannot be without the other, any more than effect can be without cause. God, the One or Primal Cause, gave Itself for all; and this giving or sacrificing is the essence of All Good—or God—in Humanity. When conditions rule, results become visible. For example: given a vessel, water and fire, steam is the result. Now these conditions can be so controlled up to a certain point that steam is prevented having exit; but after that certain point is reached and passed no choice is possible. *It is*. That is cause working out to a logical effect. So with the Principle of Life which we call God. In the beginning *it was*. Now, *man is*. God unmanifest would have been unknown, unhonored and unloved; but God as a Creator or Father had to sacrifice Himself to know this great joy. He had to give His wondrous potentialities, bestow His glorious attributes, which were not manifest even to Himself, until He made them so through the act of giving or self-sacrifice for the All. He could not know His own glories any more than a man can see or know the fullness of his own pro-creative powers until he has given hostages to fortune."

Just then her mother called Gracie, and, excusing herself, saying she would return directly, the young girl left the room, and Cyril begged Edna to finish her thoughts, for he was deeply interested, remarking in enquiring tones, "I see you mean that God, or the Great Life Principle (as you name it) would still have

remained a potential yet unknown Absolute had it not poured Itself out or given Its life for life, though it seems strange to me to hear God called *It*. I take it that is the way you would express what I mean?" he inferred.

"Yes, yes; you have said it well, Cyril," exclaimed Edna. "That's it, 'given life for life.' Primal Energy—which men call God—sacrificed that as yet unmanifest, potential essence of all life, contained within Itself, that It might have Itself made visible in manifest and vitalized activity, by a fuller, grander, more all-embracing life; with greater possibilities for attaining and revealing through Itself glories yet unknown and certainly inconceivable to even Its Infinitude."

"Then you would infer that God did not Himself know what wonders His act of creation would reveal?" questioned the young man, surprisedly.

"I will not be so rash or presumptuous now as to say what God did or did not know, for we as finite beings expressing but imperfectly as yet the Infinite, cannot fathom the Infinite; else should we no longer be finite. But I will use another example which comes to me now and is most applicable to the subject under discussion, though you might perhaps think it could have been in better taste; still, on this particular occasion you will, I think, follow my meaning better if I adhere to the illustration that just now occurs to me. It is this: when a man gives of the substance of his own being, the essence of himself, to create a son or child, by that act we say he constitutes himself a father. He has become a pro-creator by the power of the Spirit through his flesh. He then gives in essence all the best (or even it may be the worst) of himself. All his attributes, virtues, impulses, or vices, as it may be, for he cannot separate them then, are *himself* whatsoever he may be; they are indissolubly intermingled and inseparable in essence when once sacrificed or given forth. He gives *what he is*. At no time afterwards or during the life of that son can he take

from or add to it. The creation is finished as a creation from the beginning. He therefore reproduces himself in miniature, as he then is ; and he has to take the risk of that which he has brought into existence, being a credit or discredit to himself as the creator and father thereof. But, during the plastic state of childhood, that father may or may not so train and direct the mind of his child as to cause him to cultivate the good qualities, and uproot the bad—that is, presuming the child will submit his will unto his father's, in which case that parent will have joy in his son."

"But a child frequently chooses its own way, and when come to manhood, exerts its own will in opposition to its parents, and is able to show a will of its own apart from the will of its parents ; for every child born has a separate and independent will, you will allow ? " contended Cyril.

"True ; and so too has man, the child of God. He has free will ; and that helps to explain the question, 'Does God know ? ' " returned Edna. "Now, no parent knows whether his child will follow his own will or do the will of the father, nor yet can any earthly parent foresee whether his child will elect the good or the evil path in life : he may consider that he should do so, but that is quite another question. Even supposing that a father has endeavored by all means in his power to inculcate the good and eliminate the evil propensities in his son ; these must work themselves out and that only through experience. That is the test ; and although the experience of all humanity is abstractly one, it is not the same to *each one*, but various in form and degrees. Therefore, in gaining his experiences the son may choose a path that will, for the time, dishonor the parent and bring sorrow upon his head. Or he may elect to walk in such a way that he shall indeed glorify his father and reflect credit on his name. I hope this has explained the question to you clearly, or as well as I at present have light upon the subject to reveal it ? " queried Edna, opening her eyes and looking at Cyril with a gentle questioning smile in their depths.

"Yes, indeed, I think you have made it very plain to me and have also given me much food for quiet thought," he returned. "Now I see why Jesus was called the well-beloved Son in whom the Father was well-pleased. But do you really think it is possible of attainment for all on earth to-day?" he asked.

"Can you doubt it? Just as you are the son of your father and have the same qualities within you to manifest him, if you will use them as one of your brothers might, in like manner are we all partakers with Jesus Christ in the good gifts of our Heavenly Father. You remember Jesus said distinctly 'My Father and your Father; My God and your God,' thus making us His brethren and sons of His Father—God—through the Heavenly Father or Lord God, of our spiritual being, or soul essence; and sons of man in our natural body or flesh. For this reason was Jesus called Son of Man *and* Son of God; and He was the first-born of many brethren; therefore our Elder Brother in Spirit through the flesh."

"Thank you exceedingly for the assistance you have given me by these thoughts, Miss Edna; I feel that I have such a rich feast that I may only be able to digest a portion and perhaps grasp but a part, and that a very small part, of a very beautiful whole. I almost wish I had taken some notes now or written it down as you said it," he remarked.

"Had you attempted to do that I could not have opened my soul's inmost secrets to you so freely as I perhaps have done to-day. Spirit must commune with spirit and the inquiring mind of the spirit in you spoke to the spiritual mind in me, and *that* interchange of truth is the fire off the altar that, touching our lips like a live coal, causes us to speak words at other seasons unutterable, or like the Apostles at Pentecost, 'with new tongues,'" she asserted calmly, rising as she ended.

"May I ask you a favor, Miss Esbourne?" said the young clergyman, rising also and standing before her with his eyes fixed intently upon her gravely sweet

countenance, while he laid his hand upon hers as it rested upon the table.

"Most assuredly, Cyril; ask me anything, and if it is within my power to do it you may consider it already granted," she replied.

"Well, will you let me come to you freely whenever I am perplexed about these subjects. Let me come to you as a brother might, and not think any the less of me or my knowledge, or lack of it, because I am a clergyman. I suppose I ought to consider that I know more about these matters than do you, who are a woman; but I freely admit that I am now convinced I do not. But I tell you honestly that I want to learn. I am most eager to know more; to see and understand things as you do. Will you help me, Edna?" he asked, wistfully looking into her dark eyes.

Edna caught both his hands in hers and held them while the glad light of joy beamed from her eyes upon him, and her voice betrayed the pleasure she felt as she said:

"Oh! Cyril, my dear friend, you cannot conceive how glad I am that you have been able to ask me this; it proves that you are a growing and awakening soul. Cyril, I have seen it from the time I first knew you. I felt that you had the possibilities for a great and noble purpose within you. That whenever you should awaken to the Truth for yourself you would be a strong, earnest soul in the service of the Master to help redeem the world from darkness: to strike one note that should herald the doom of dogma. You can and will do this; I feel the conviction strongly within me and I know that the Spirit of Truth in your own soul is leading you from this hour into the knowledge of all truth, for desire is prophecy. Have no fear, Cyril, be strong, be brave and go steadily forward, just trusting to your inner Guide to answer the questions that come uppermost and wait for the answer before you act or speak. Do not stifle the questions nor smother the doubts; thrash them out one by one till you are perfectly satisfied within yourself that you have got

the answer that satisfies your soul ; never mind what anyone else thinks or teaches, remember your soul is an individual expression of God and as such must learn its lesson of life. Then when you know the Truth for yourself the Truth shall make you free, and O Cyril ! what a glorious freedom it is ! I have proved it and am daily experiencing it and will gladly help you or guide you wherever it is in my power to do so, but I assure you that you have it all within yourself, I may only assist you to unfold it to yourself."

Edna paused and the young man was so much affected by the words that flowed from the lips of the woman that he could only reply by bending his head and pressing his lips to the hands that held his own imprisoned.

Here Gracie re-entered the room quietly and, throwing her arms around her sister's shoulders, said banteringly : " Cyril, I am jealous. Know you not, sir, that this is my exclusive property, and he who would approach it nearer than to gaze upon it must first ask my permission."

Smilingly, Cyril turned and recovering his voice said : " Then I will be compelled to resort to extremes to attain my desired ends, I am afraid."

" What are those extremes ? " demanded Gracie, mischievously, laying her cheek against Edna's shoulder, while her arms still encircled her.

" Well, if you will force my hand, I can see there is but one remedy, and that is I must become owner of the owner," he answered gravely and with a meaning look at Edna.

" There now, dear, you got exactly what you asked for," cried Edna, laughingly, as Gracie's face was now buried on her sister's shoulder mantled in blushes. " Here you are, Cyril : I, the possessed, lend you the possessor till it finds a worthy owner ; always remembering that we are all brothers and sisters in the great family of God." Stooping, Edna kissed Gracie's cheek, while disengaging her arms, then smiled tenderly upon them both and left the room.

When alone, Cyril and Gracie stood for a few moments where Edna had left them, neither willing to break the silence which her abrupt departure following upon Cyril's daring retort to Gracie's banter, had flung over them. The young clergyman was the first to recover his self-possession and with a very tender light in his eyes and a reverential expression upon his pale boyish face he stepped closer to where Gracie was standing. Her head was bent and her eyelids drooping, while her fingers mechanically turned over the pages of the books on the table.

Gracie Esbourne felt Cyril approach, knew instinctively that he was close beside her; that he was looking at her very intently; that he was going to speak; to say something that had been hovering on his lips for some time and which her soul had already heard. She stood there like a very beautiful statue, waiting, like Galatea, for her Pygmalion to breathe his life into her soul; the life of love, that would warm her being and kindle the coals for the offering upon the altar of her heart: kindle them till they should burst forth into living flame that would be as the immortal fires of eternal love, undying, unquenchable for ever and ever.

The next moment Cyril had spoken. Simple though the words were, the tone in which they were breathed held all that was not voiced and the inner self of the girl by his side heard and understood. Then the quivering, pulsating heart of the man was conscious that the soul of the woman answered his. This gave him the courage to utter the words that fell upon her ears in such deeply vibrating and earnest tones that thrilled her whole being.

"Gracie, I love you."

The fair head drooped lower, the sweet face turned a rosy pink and then paled and flushed again; the long dark lashes swept the cheeks and the mass of golden curls that she still wore simply bound back from the broad white brow, tumbled over her pretty

neck and shoulders as though eager to veil the maiden blushes of virgin modesty, purity and love. But the rosy lips did not answer then. Again the man spoke, bending his dark head nearer to the fair one beside him.

"Gracie, you ought to know, dear, that the purest, holiest love of a man's life is yours. It is the best part of my manhood I am offering to you, the part which is next to that he offers to his God. It is none too good even then, dearest, but I offer it humbly for your acceptance, my pure and spotless flower. Tell me, Gracie, do you love me?"

While speaking Cyril had caught the two restless hands and held them in his own close clasp; then he unresistingly drew their owner nearer and nearer to himself till she could feel his warm breath fanning her cheek through her veil of hair. Yet she could not find a breath within her bosom strong enough to voice what she felt. She was suffocating with the intensity of her pure and sweet maidenly joy. She was silent because she could not speak, not because she would not; till he drew her at last close to his side and within his embrace, and the fair head rested upon his shoulder trustingly, confidingly. Then once again he whispered pleadingly:

"Gracie, my darling, let me hear you tell me in words what my heart feels is true, that you do love me as I love you, my own fair and beautiful beloved one, my little angel sweetheart."

Then the answer came from the sweet lips, bravely and unfalteringly, while her face was hidden against that strong breast—strong because a true and manly heart beat beneath it and beat unfalteringly, truly and wholly for her, as she well knew, yes, had known for some time; but the whispered words were only:

"Yes, Cyril, I love you."

Gracie Esbourne was tasting at that supreme moment of her short life her first draught of unalloyed happiness, the ecstasy of a first love, the purest, holiest passion on earth.

As her words of surrender, her sweet confession, fell upon his ears, the young clergyman bent over her bowed head and lifted the lovely flower-like face to his, and looking into those deep violet eyes took the first kiss of love from those parted lips. But there was a sanctity about that first lover's kiss that alas is so often lacking when given on those sacred occasions in the lives of two human beings. It was the first, the very first kiss he had ever given to woman outside his own family circle, and his also was the first that the lips of Gracie had ever received from man, other than her father and brothers. Truly, the angel of Purity hovered over that holy betrothal and the blessing of the High Priest of Holy Love was the seal upon those pledged vows.

CHAPTER XXXI.

RENUNCIATION.

"A new life is slowly taking shape in the minds of earnest thinkers in which Men, and not Things, will be the most valued elements in the body social." —NICHOLAS CHRISTIAN.

Later that same evening that the little scene was being enacted in the study, Edna and Roger were seated together on the wide front verandah overlooking the bay, when Edna related to him the remarkable message which Gracie had received through the mystic voice. Roger did not attempt to offer any solution of the problem as to where it came from, but remarked :

"With regard to the latter statement, I am quite in accord with the assertion that Christ's Spirit is in the world to-day. I also know that this is a view held by thousands ; and during my travels in India I had an opportunity of learning something about what are known as ' the lesser mysteries.' There are others, too, who even assert that Jesus of Nazareth is still alive, and living in seclusion on this planet, while the Spirit of

Christ which inhabited the body of Jesus for three years, and called by Him, before He retired from public sight, 'The Comforter,' still dwells with all His faithful followers. These are the secrets of the wise men of the East, Fellows of the Illuminati. There are others also, known as the Mahatmas, who live on the heights of the Himalayas; and some of these men are reported to be several thousand years old; indeed it is uncertain what the real age of many of them may be. They are credited with being able to leave their bodies at will and in their astral, or rather spiritual, form to visit all parts of the globe—matter, time and space being no barrier to them. In this way they perform many good works and impart knowledge and spiritual truths to such receptive minds as may be fitted to receive them. These masters are said to live in this seclusion as far as their personality is concerned, but their influence in the world is beyond estimation. Their wisdom is far greater than anything yet attained by the most enlightened men of this age. Indeed, it is beyond what the modern world has ever yet been able to grasp, since it requires special preparation and much self-sacrifice to become even an initiate, let alone reach the spiritual heights to which these brothers have most assuredly attained. They fan the sparks of intuition and keep alive the truth, purity and goodness that alone saves the world from moral destruction through materialism. This would perhaps account for such inspirational messages as Gracie tells you she received. I ———."

"Oh! Roger," interrupted Edna, "what a glorious thought your words have stirred within me! Perhaps these Mahatmas are the same wise men of the East, three of whom went to worship the babe of Bethlehem. Since if they are thousands of years old and know all these things they would also know when to expect His birth."

"Yes, it has been stated by accredited authorities that Jesus of Nazareth belonged to one of these orders Himself prior to His three years' ministry. They were

called the Essenes, and He was a brother with them from His youth up till about His 29th year, when He went forth to teach and give out to the multitudes the truths and mysteries, even in parables, which the Fraternity considered were sacred to them and only to be imparted to initiates of their order."

"Then it may be that there among the masters you spoke of just now we should seek for Jesus: that same Jesus who ascended into the clouds nineteen hundred years ago. Perhaps it is there we shall discover our long lost Messiah, waiting till the good seed He sowed in the garden of our hearts should take root and bring forth fruit, when the world would be ready to receive Him, for it would understand His teachings. Why, yes," continued Edna, with glowing eyes and kindling enthusiasm, "in that case He would indeed still be in the world and be able to do as these wise men are reported as doing: send out His strong Spirit in many forms to help and succour those who need His loving hand to guide them in times of doubt and temptation! How else could he be so well able to help? How else could He know what particular kind of assistance we each needed, seeing how the race has progressed since His day and generation, and how so-called civilization has brought so many new and insidious temptations to the children of men! How would He otherwise prove to the world (which rejected Him) that He had overcome death and had Himself gained eternal consciousness of life unless He could have been somewhere among men who would be able to give proofs to the doubters that He had indeed been with them all the time—men whose records would be able to furnish the most undoubted historical proofs of such facts as these? How could He know what pangs the martyrs suffered for His name's sake during the days of the Inquisition, had He not been among them and moved perchance in a veil of flesh through their midst, supporting them by His strong spirit of endurance to bear the cruel and in some cases still more awful death to which the same world had

subjected Him, and that too in the name of God and for the cause of religion? Yes, He would be a partaker of every cup of sorrow, pain and suffering which all His followers have had to drink for His name's sake. "No, no," she continued, excitedly, waxing more eloquent as the thoughts flowed through her brain and her very face seemed transformed by the wonder of the secret she believed she had stumbled upon: the secret of the ages, surely? "No, Jesus could not be on a far away throne of light and glory in peace and enjoyment while His disciples were mourning and grieving and languishing in foul prisons because of their fidelity to Him and love for His dear name. He could not be there under such circumstances any more than I could be happy here with you now if I thought Gracie was in pain or trouble and needed me by her side. Can we then suppose that the disciple is greater than his Lord?"

"You must admit though, Edna," interposed Roger, "that even if Jesus really be hidden away in some recess of this earth and in the company of wise men, it is of no more conscious benefit to us as human beings than if He really lived above the clouds."

"Yes, but He would indeed be 'in the clouds' to us if He were away on some lofty inaccessible mountain top. Then when the time is fulfilled and the new day of the world breaks, He will come in the clouds of our own sense-consciousness and be born in our own hearts by love to all beings, and then appear to our mortal vision as if He had descended from the spheres above us, just in the same manner as He ascended in a cloud out of sight of His amazed disciples long ago. Only think, though, Roger, how wonderful, how glorious it would be if it were a *woman* who should discover this hidden Master! Should find Him arisen, just as Mary Magdalene did at the tomb when she thought it was but the gardener. Then to hear Him say 'Mary!' and know she had been the first to behold the risen Life and hear the voice of her Lord and Master! Surely the woman who searched for and

found Him at the tomb, and the one who should again discover him in his mountain hiding place, surely she shall be His holy bride ! Then it is for the coming of this bride He waits. Oh ! ” cried Edna, glowing with new fervor as fresh ideas opened up to her wondering vision, “ what a glorious privilege ! What a wondrous destiny for the woman who finds her Lord ! How I wish it might be mine ! All the sorrows and disappointments of a thousand lives would be as nothing to me then. I should be willing to walk through the whole earth bare-footed if I might but hope to reach the spot the first of all my sex, and there discover our long-lost and expected Lord and know I was worthy to be His bride ! Only to discover that He is really here among us now, waiting for us to recognise Him. That He has never, never been away from us at all. That He is as He predicted the Son of Man should be, ‘ like Jonah, in the heart of the earth three days,’ Three days ! and a thousand years is but as a day to the Lord ! It is nearly two thousand years since He left the world and this is the morning, or rather the dawning, of a new day, when very early, ‘ while it is yet dark ’ (the night of ignorance and error not yet gone), He shall rise out of the tomb cut in the rock on the side of a hill. There He has lain, so to speak, for nearly twenty centuries, awaiting the resurrection morn : the new birth of the race that is now close at hand. Oh ! Roger, surely this is the mystery of the ages and to me it is too wonderful, yea, even sublime.” Then Edna added in softened tones, “ Ah ! truly it hath been said that ‘ Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor can the tongue of man reveal, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, to conceive the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.’ But—perhaps, perhaps—” she said reflectively, as she glanced up into Roger’s face—“ perhaps He hath reserved it for a *Woman*—His last and highest creation—to discover them as she discovered that the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge was good ; so shall she find wisdom by the revelation of the Spirit, for the

Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things (or secrets) of God."

While Edna had been speaking with her usual impulsive fervor, Roger Northbrook had been watching her and experiencing a medley of sensations, which consisted of several phases of feeling, chiefly wonderment at the stupendous idea which the mind of this woman had conceived as possible. Again, he could not but take up a critical mental attitude regarding the utter improbability of it all, and the baselessness of it as a statement of facts to the world of to-day. Then again there was also pervading him a feeling of keen regret, amounting to a sharp stab of pain at the very evident spirituality of the woman by his side—a spirituality which seemed to permeate every atom of her being and so placed her beyond the reach of mortal man. That she should think it such a grand, a glorious thing to be the bride of Jesus Christ! Then he considered this made it so much the more impossible for her ever to be content to be the wife of a man! quite forgetting for the moment in his chagrin that Jesus was a Man, "tempted in all points like unto His brethren, yet without sin." This thought, however, was to Roger for the time a bitter disappointment, he found himself regretting that he had unwittingly mentioned the facts relating to the existence of the wise men, since by so doing he had opened up to her ardent seeking soul new vistas of thought, and revealed a new mansion of mind which she had rapidly explored with her usual perspicuity.

Roger Northbrook, though a fine strong character, gifted with spiritual insight beyond the average man, had not been able to shake off all his worldly prejudices, despite the fact that he had already had one or two convincing evidences of the hidden wisdom and power of this woman. Even these had not yet purged him from that mortal sense which still claimed him as a son of Man who inherits many of the impulses and desires that caused our father Adam to fall from his original high estate as a son of God, and so take

pleasure in the things of the lower self. So, while ever Roger Northbrook shall desire to draw this woman from the place to which she has soared as a soul and to make her "like to other women," he shall not be able to approach her; he shall be kept off as by invisible hands, or a flaming sword, as it were, that makes it impossible for him to enter where he longed to be, yet could not discover the way. Until he does he must still remain outside his Eden separated from his true mate—Eve. But when he is ready and willing to lay aside the filthy rags of worldly prejudice; to uproot the thorns and thistles of experience; and can forget himself and his own fleshly desires in his one and only soul-craving, can lift up his eyes to the spiritual hills on which this woman now stands above him, and exclaim: "What shall I do to win you, to call you my own?" then shall the gentle voice of the woman whisper sweetly, tenderly: "Come unto me—only recognise me for what I am; love me for myself as you would love yourself, for I am yourself, your true, your higher self, your very soul objectified. Then and then alone you shall have me, and so inherit your birthright as a son of God—the birthright of eternal life and conscious union with the Infinite Love."

Then what of Edna? What were her feelings at this supreme hour of her existence? The hour or moment when such a revelation was vouchsafed to her seeking soul? Words cannot describe them, for words are inadequate to express what the soul feels. Only a few minutes ago, it seemed, and she had been outside this great truth, and now that it was unveiled to her, the whole world seemed to have taken on a different aspect, everything seemed holier, purer, better and nobler because of the great Presence which she was convinced still dwelt in it and walked through it, though unseen and as yet unknown. She knew that something grand and holy had come into her own heart, filling her life with a new purpose, flooding her soul with a wondrous joy and peace and overflowing her entire being till she felt as though she were bathed in a

sea of radiant light. She had no conscious sensation beyond this, and could not put such into words, her one desire just then was to get away by herself for a while to think these things out alone and give herself up to silent meditation and prayer.

Then Roger broke the silence by remarking : " Of course, I have no authentic proof of the personal existence of Jesus on earth. I should think that if Jesus had been in the world all these centuries He would not have left His people to mourn and grieve so long over His supposed death. If He really lived in the world, would He not have revealed Himself to them long ago ? "

" No, Roger, it comes to me like this," answered Edna, " that He could not reveal Himself till the time was fulfilled. It was said that when the Christ came He would abide for ever. Now Jesus was the Christ then, and He sowed the seed of Truth in the world, and He must abide till it be ripe for the harvest ; just as the husbandman who sows seed in his field and then leaves his servants to till and look after it till it is fully grown, and he returns to superintend the reaping. I think that the revelation of these great truths to us in these latter days is a sign that the time is at hand, the day is drawing nearer for Him to appear and when He comes again the world will know Him, and remember that He it was who sowed the seed, and ' they will look upon Him whom they pierced ' and in sorrow mourn that they knew Him not then, but His faithful followers will welcome Him with joy and receive Him gladly. Now you see ' we all wait as those who watch for the morning. ' "

" Still, though your ideas are very beautiful," rejoined Roger, striving to obliterate the strong impression his words had made upon the mind and heart of the woman by his side, " I think the Rev. Cyril would say that the statement regarding the likelihood of Jesus Christ being alive, or living as a man, in this world during all these centuries, is scarcely in accordance with the teachings of scripture. You know, He

said 'I go to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.' What did He mean by that unless it was ascending into heaven?"

"We had a discussion upon the subject of heaven and where it is, you remember, and I think we arrived at the conclusion that heaven is a state of consciousness and that as such must be *within* each individual soul: it is the place where God, the Father of Jesus Christ, and our Father, dwells; for He told us distinctly that 'The kingdom of heaven is within us,' did He not? Well," continued Edna, earnestly, "in that case, when He said that He ascended unto His Father, do you not think He meant that having reached the perfection of the Christ or the highest type of mankind, He was passing on into a higher state of consciousness which entitled Him to enter the kingdom of a God and therefore put on His godhood as He put off His perfected manhood. This would certainly be 'going to His Father,' and what He did is possible for every one of us, according to His own statements; then His Father in like manner may become, and indeed is, our Father in Heaven."

"Splendid! Excellent!" ejaculated Roger, his tone changing. "I must say I never heard a more able or more complete explanation of that statement made by Christ, given by anyone, not even our most learned bishops. There is not the least doubt that you are inspired from on high," he concluded, looking into her face very earnestly and with true admiration expressed in his every feature for the wisdom of this woman.

"It is but the prophecy fulfilled in these latter days, that 'he shall pour out his spirit on all flesh and on his handmaidens, and they shall prophesy,'" replied Edna quietly. "But I would remark that if the church cannot allow that Jesus Christ is actually in the world *now*, then surely its preaching is in vain. I feel—indeed I have thought much about this lately—that the Messiah is certainly here amongst us; it is more and more evident to my mind that Christ,

who was to live for ever, never really left the earth. He is amongst us to-day as much as He was among the multitudes in Judea's cities, but in like manner is known only to a few simple faithful souls—or disciples—just as He was then. He is still unrecognised by the many, and rejected as the promised Messiah; again and again, He is despised, scoffed at, and crucified, even by those who claim Him as their Lord and call themselves by His name. Behold: He walks in our midst in the forms of our many brethren, still wearing the veil of flesh which He could take off and put on at will, as He told them himself, yet we have still doubted His words. He is a very masquerading God, and may thus pass through our streets among the multitudes who throng there; He hears His name daily blasphemed and taken in vain by those whom He came to teach and save. He listens to the cry of those who lack bread while thousands have plenty; of those who are persecuted, injured and outcast, scorned and spit upon by those who are not worthy to throw even the first stone at the one whom He Himself forgave. These wretched and fallen sin-stained ones to-day ask in vain for help and pity from those who call themselves His servants, His followers, teachers and preachers of His Gospel of peace, love and goodwill to all mankind. They voice these lessons from stately pulpits in handsome churches over all the world, and yet never soil their fingers to help lift up a down-trodden or forlorn soul.

Again Christ takes the form of one of those outcasts (man or woman) and perchance enters into one of these noble looking edifices, which are consecrated to His name and service; and there He listens to the songs of praise and honor and glory which are sung in worship of Him as their King, seated as they imagine away in a far-off heaven on a great white throne, where myriads of angels wait to do His bidding. Not to this humble Master, seated so lowly among them would they lift their voices in anthems and hymns of laudation. Him they knew not, and

would not own Him if He then announced Himself as their Lord and King. Nay, were He to request them to allow Him to preach a sermon to His brethren from one of their pulpits, they would first ask Him where he had obtained His degrees, and what sect or creed was His. I fancy He would have to do as others are doing to-day—go into the people's park, or domain, and voice His great message there as He did on Galilee's sea or sloping hillsides. But no, He sits patiently among us and gazes around the sacred fanes where He beholds fine pictures and windows on which are represented the scenes of His betrayal, crucifixion, death, burial and final resurrection; and He listens to the eloquent sermons preached about Him, which perchance bring tears to the eyes of the congregation, especially at this Easter season, when the ceremonial of the world's tragedy is made so much of; but He knows that these tears are not shed for Him, the lowly Master, Who has nothing to offer them but His love; they are for Him as the Lord the King in His glory, who has many benefits to bestow; and that poor weary wayfarer kneeling amongst that worshipping throng is not expected to need help, tears or pity from this devotional assembly. They have no worship to give to the poor outcast Jesus: it is only for the resurrected Christ Jesus, the risen King. Then He hears the appeal of the priests and ministers for donations to help decorate the altars, or erect new and larger buildings in which to worship Him; for gifts to lay at the feet of this yet invisible but glorified King Jesus. And though there He is among them, apparently in need and want while He wears the form of 'one of our needy brethren or sisters,' still their eyes are holden and they recognise Him not, 'for their hearts are not right before God.' They do not even offer him the cup of cold water, or ask if this hungry one needs bread, unless He makes his special appeal and proves his case a worthy one, though 'God sends His rain on the just and the unjust.' Indeed, if he happens to be in the form of one who is shabbily attired, a poor yet devout

worshipper of the Lord Christ, and chance to enter the house of prayer dedicated to His name, he will be conducted to a back seat in a secluded corner, far away from the front of the altar where these ceremonials are being performed in His honor. Not to the front, for these chief seats are not for such as He, but, just as it was in the synagogues in His own day, they are reserved for the rich, great and noble in the esteem of the world, who deign to honor it by their presence and dole out their earthly treasures to win for themselves as they think, some share in His heavenly glories. 'But the Lord shall be a trap to the whole earth,' and ah! how wonderfully applicable are His words to-day as ever: 'Verily they have their reward'; they have their glory and honor now. But 'to those who love Him and do His holy will' He says, 'As ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.' " And as Edna ended this speech her voice was trembling with emotion.

"I am afraid that is a terribly sweeping indictment you have just made against the Church," remarked Roger, smiling gravely. "You know she does not forget almsgiving, nor neglect to dispense charity to the poor and needy."

"I am not speaking against the Church as an institution," replied Edna quickly, "only as regards her sincerity and fidelity, her love to the Lord Jesus Christ as Master and Bridegroom; never mind who or where He is; just because He loved her and gave Himself for her should she love and adore Him and seek to do His will, which is 'Love one another, and thy neighbor as thyself.' His story of the good Samaritan tells us who our neighbor is. Then as to the almsgiving, which is done so largely in the churches to-day, it is not the almsgiving of the Samaritan, even; but is given as charity and it is branded '*charity*,' too. Jesus did not do that. *He* bade us give LOVE. It is love the people want, not charity—though the meaning of the words may be synonymous in one respect, they are not so when put into action. Charity is as cold as the

coins that represent it. Love—*love* is the live coal from off the altar of our hearts; and it is this living part of our real selves which we should give to the hungry, needy ones of our Father's great family, if we would be true brethern of Jesus Christ or ever call Him our dear Lord and Master. Charity often falls short of its purpose, but Love—ah! *LOVE never faileth*. If it is ever my privilege to preach to a congregation I would give them love, the very essence of God; and thus would I indeed give them eternal life in Christ our risen Lord. I often wish that it had been my place in life to be a minister or teacher of the Gospel of Jesus; I often long to tell the people these glorious truths, to tell them the meaning of love: the Love that means God. There are times when I move among them here, and see their weary, sad and loveless faces seeking for they know not what, and never, never satisfied. Oh! I long with a great longing to cry aloud this wonderful message of love; to bid them go and love one another purely, cleanly, truly and unselfishly, and they will then know that love is the elixir of life; love is the health of the race; love, pure and holy love, alone saves the world. To teach them to love each other as Jesus loved us is the Kingdom of Christ on earth," concluded Edna.

"I think you have indeed missed your vocation, and that you are intended for a great teacher," said Roger Northbrook. "But you would be a reformer, and the churches are not anxious to open their doors to such to-day, nor are they ever willing to accept a woman preacher at any time. Paul's doctrine has made them set their faces against all such, which I think is a pity in some respects, since women are much more spiritual than most men, and have more of the love element in their composition, such as you were just speaking of as being so necessary to the good of the world. Love comes naturally to a woman just as wisdom is supposed to be the exclusive prerogative of men, though I must admit that I have learned more of what is true and unadulterated wisdom from your

lips, Edna, than I have ever garnered in my travels through the fields of literature or in the highways of the world."

"Thank you for your frank avowal, and coming from you I appreciate it highly, but it is not I who speak, remember, but the Spirit of Truth which speaketh through me and indeed illumines all the sons and daughters of our Father-God."

There was silence between the two on the verandah for some seconds, and as Edna noticed that Roger made no rejoinder, she changed the subject by remarking that she saw a great change in Cyril Clifford's attitude towards these truths, adding, "How much I wish he could be brought to teach them instead of the dogmas he is compelled to voice in the Church to-day."

"But do you not think, Edna, that it would be unwise to try and woo him from the Church?" protested Roger. "He can do his work there quite as effectively as on any other platform."

"No, I would not think of wooing him from the Church, Roger. That is not at all necessary," replied Edna. "I do not consider that he should make any change whatsoever in his mode of life, not even if he should grasp these principles of truth in their fulness and as strongly as I anticipate he will yet do. The Church more than any other place wants such teachers and preachers. To my mind, the churches are like the altar in the tabernacle, all ready prepared for the offering and only requiring the fire to be kindled from on high. To-day it awaits the coming of the High Priest of Truth and Righteousness: He Who will ignite the long burnt-out embers and from the ashes of what was once a living faith, re-vitalize it by love and so resuscitate that wavering power in the hearts and souls of the people. Give them spiritual bread instead of the husks of dogma and the stones of tradition. Then they will no longer worship idols, but will listen to the voice of Love divine and impersonal *within* them saying, 'Thou shalt have no other Gods but Me.'"

"I quite agree with all you say, Edna," replied Roger, "but I do not fancy that Cyril Clifford will ever be one of those high priests of Truth you mention. He needs more self-reliance and a greater individuality to fill such a place in the religious world of to-day. One requires to be an enthusiast in the work they take up if they would bring about any great results or effect any lasting reform of that kind; and so far as I am any judge of character, Cyril is anything but that: he lacks continuity of purpose. Now you," he continued, turning and looking into her eyes, "you, Edna, had you been a man, would have been the very person for that mission. You would have hesitated at nothing but would have gone on in the face of the most adverse conditions and faced the most insurmountable obstacles to effect your purpose; and you would have overcome all where you saw the attainment of the highest as possible for yourself, or the greatest good for the greatest number of your fellow creatures. You have no idea what a fire-brand you would have been in this respect; what a disturber of the peace that has settled down upon the religious world of to-day—peace, too, that is no peace. Had fate so ruled it that you had been born a man and placed in the position to give you the faintest chance of voicing your convictions or carrying out your projects, I would even dare to predict that you would not only have been a reformer, in the broadest sense of the term, but a revolutionist also," he concluded, with a laugh.

"You seem to have gauged my character very thoroughly from the masculine standpoint, Roger," said Edna, smiling. "But you have forgotten to take into consideration that it is not an impossibility for a woman to be and to do all that you mention, especially in these progressive days. Besides," she added, "there would not be anything very terrible to me in the fact of being a reformer or even a revolutionist if I knew I was such for a good cause. Jesus of Nazareth was both a Reformer and a Revolutionist of the highest order, I consider, and I would not be ashamed to follow

such a Leader, even though I am a woman and living in the nineteenth century."

"I believe you, Edna," asserted Roger, with an air of conviction. "Yet it is not exactly the role for a woman I should imagine. There are so many better and milder ways in which a woman can perform the same work. The home is the woman's sphere of influence, the place where she shines with undimmed lustre, and where, like the coral insect—the slow invisible builders—she can work with the most lasting results, often proving more effective than by making showy surface efforts. Take my advice, dear Edna, and I assure you I speak as a friend, not altogether in my own interests—though," he added more gently and with a new inflexion in his voice, "I may state I have both interests and hopes of my own that would be inclined to sway me where you are concerned or your future affected. But, take my advice as one who knows the world we live in to-day, and do not let your enthusiasm in this New Thought carry you away beyond the bounds of calm, cool, common sense and reason. The surest way to convince the world that you have found something that will last—something steadfast and true to which they can anchor their weary drifting souls when storm-tossed on the ocean of life—a very Rock of Ages, as it were—is to prove it first in your own everyday life. To live it first yourself in all its phases is the sure way to prove its power. Emotionalism is wasted force. I consider the world has grown sick and tired of emotional religion. That weeping, wailing and hysterical form of evangelism will never save the world because it only appeals to the emotions and not to the reason. That is where Christians—or those who call themselves such—have lost their power over the people, or the thinking portion of them at any rate; for they have offered them long prayers, with lugubrious countenances, moans, sobs and groans; in place of songs, joy, laughter, gladness, and merry hearts and faces, till at length the power of this world has been stronger than the hope of heaven, or even the attraction

of it to most people, and they have come to the philosophical conclusion that the best way to be sure of joy and happiness is to take all they can get of it in this life and leave the rest to chance. No, my dear friend," he continued, "I do not speak disparagingly about religion in its deepest sense and truest meaning, but I speak from a large and extensive knowledge of the world, its myriad religions, and the people in it, and I strive to 'see life steadily and to see it whole.' Now if, as you state, God is enshrined in every soul, then the majority must represent the greater portion of God, consequently we should study the needs of the many rather than the few. In this respect I would warn you to walk very carefully in these new paths, for they are not those which have been trodden by generations gone before, and the way is narrow and difficult unless caution and commonsense are used at every step. Now do not run on ahead—as you are inclined to do, I fear—and leave many of those whom you might be able to help or succour, so far behind you that they cannot follow, and are likely to lose sight of you altogether; for while your head is in the clouds of mystery they are running hither and thither striving to find the way, or else drifting back into a more hopeless and desperate condition of mind than that from which you had tried so nobly yet fearlessly to save them. Remember, Edna, that all are not ready for these higher revelations, and even you would do well to analyze, sift and thoroughly examine every new or startling idea or statement made by another before you attempt to voice it by tongue or pen. The world of to-day wants facts, not theories, something that will make them more able to bear and to be; to face the daily life struggle with strength and courage. Give them that, Edna, and you will have given them what is better than gold; teach them the simple lessons of love to one another, which you referred to just now, and you will be doing the world a service. Leave the mysteries of the beyond to the future ages. Revelation is the inevitable fruit of the

Tree of Life ; but, in my opinion, humanity has not yet got beyond the blossoming stage."

Roger Northbrook paused in this, for him, long speech. Edna had listened to his words very attentively and with a quiet deference not unmixed with astonishment to learn that he had such a wide knowledge upon these subjects. She forgot that she had always been the one to talk and had never given the man a chance to express his opinions, and that therefore in deference to her he could but listen. Even though he might not always agree with her theories he might be justified in expressing admiration of their refined sophistry and surprise that she held them as fixed opinions of her own. In her inmost heart she was conscious that she went far beyond the bounds of reason in her eerie flights of fancy and spiritual illumination ; there were moments when she felt that she was not of the earth and that while in that state she had no sympathy with those who were : that she was at such times lifted so far above the impulses and desires of the human in her flights after the divine, that she was incapable of understanding the wants, temptations and sorrows or joys of her fellow creatures. Now the words of the man by her side had brought her to earth with a sudden pull and she felt that she must face the practical part of existence as well as its idealism. She did not doubt then that his voice but echoed the thoughts of many ; his feelings would be but the mirror of what hundreds of others would experience if she attempted to speak or teach what she had recently discovered in the deep and sacred recesses of her soul. As she did not make any reply to his remarks, Roger said :

" I hope I have not wounded you, Edna ? Believe me, I only spoke from a sincere desire to guide and help you in your work for truth and service for humanity. You know it is my dearest wish to prove to you that I have only your best interests and future happiness at heart, Edna. Never could I forget —— "

" No, no, I am not in the least hurt, Roger,"

interrupted Edna at this point. "How could I be with you, above all men: you whom I know even better than you think I do? I quite understand the motives that have prompted you to thus warn me even against myself and my too impulsive and rather enthusiastic temperament. The motive is only the best, the truest and kindest possible, and I appreciate it as such. But—but, I must think over what you have said, and must analyze my inmost convictions regarding my future actions in the propagation of these truths as I know them. You know that I am fully convinced that I am led by a higher power than myself—that is, as I or you understand myself—and to that higher self I must go for guidance. That can only be done in the silence and alone, so till I have been there we will not further discuss the subject." Before Roger could respond she added in lighter vein:

"You are going for that long purposed trip to New Zealand soon, are you not? How long will you be absent from Australia?"

"That is uncertain as yet," he returned, quietly acquiescing in her wish to drop the former discussion. "It will depend upon the will of another, and, failing that, then just how long it will take me to collect the material and information I require for my new book."

"Oh! of course, I forgot it was for that purpose chiefly you are going," returned Edna, brightening up at once when his literary work was brought into question. "How is it progressing? I am afraid the events of the last few months have seriously retarded its completion, have they not?"

"Yes, I admit I have not done much to it of late, he replied, "but other things being equal, I mean to put in some good work while I am away and hope to complete it before the New Year."

"I should so much like to be able to help you, Roger, but I am afraid my assistance would be more hindrance than help to your class of work. I am not logical enough to be able to deal with such abstruse problems as political economy. I soar into the skies

when I should walk on my two feet on the earth—eh! Roger?" This with a mischievous upward glance that did not escape him.

"On the contrary, you could help me greatly, Edna. Yours is the help above all others I most crave for; the only help my heart, mind and soul really need to complete me as a man in the highest sense of the name. Edna, you do not require me to tell you what I dare to hope for? You hold the cup of water my thirsty soul pants for. You would give those cooling draughts of love to the whole world. Have you not one drop for me?"

He had turned and with a quick movement grasped her hands in his and was looking into her face eagerly trying to read his fate there. But Edna would not meet his gaze; her eyes were looking far across the twilit harbor; away to the now deepening shadows of the western horizon on which only a few long bars of copper-colored cloud still lingered over the spot where the sun had sunk to rest. Her face, though very pale, was calm and her whole attitude one of repose. Why was she feeling like this now when the cup of her life's joy was offered to her? Why was there no inward elation for her who knew so perfectly what this man was to her; the place he was bound to fill in her new and more developed life; and the part he was destined to take in the completion of that life; and that none other in heaven or earth could usurp the place that was already his, either now or throughout eternity. Why did she not turn and meet his eager questioning eyes with her own and let him read his answer there? It was because the inner self of the woman told her that as yet the man's soul was not attuned to hers, and so could not hear the still small voice of her soul speaking to his own. He was like a fine cameo that is intended to fit into a particular place in a beautiful mosaic, but is as yet in the hand of the lapidary; it must be cut still more, then rounded and polished till its shape, form, size, fitness and general

perfection are such as to add to the harmony of the design rather than detract from its beauty.

"You do not answer me, Edna," he persisted. "Have you no answer for me?"

"Not yet, Roger," she said softly, while she still averted her eyes from his.

"Why, Edna, not yet? That means there may be one—a favorable one—for me some day? Dare I hope so much?" he urged.

"Yes."

"Then what is the cause of the delay, Edna? Is it ——," he paused and then said in anxious tones, "Is it because of—of—Mysia?"

Now Edna turned and looked into his eyes fearlessly and frankly as she answered—her voice tender, clear and earnest—

"No, no, Roger; you know it is never because of *that* with you and me. I cannot tell you just now when or where the answer you crave will be given you, but I feel that it will be within your own power to make the time long or short. I ——"

"No, no, Edna!" he interrupted. "It would be now, this very moment, if it lay wholly with me."

"Roger, listen to me, dear. I renounce you now to make you more completely mine own. When you are again prompted by a desire that is stronger than all else in the world; a desire that is paramount to everything in life; a something that will be so strong, so overwhelming, so powerful, that not all the forces of earth or heaven, nor even the powers of hades could keep it from you; then, then Roger, you may come to me and ask me that question again."

"But, Edna, I feel that intense desire to call you my own now this very hour. I love you with the whole force of my being. I know no other love, I can feel no other love, all else is dead to me for ever. Why must I wait, why run the chance of losing you for ever?" he urged in expostulatory tones.

She still kept her dark eyes fixed upon his face as she arose and stood before him, her hands held in

both of his, while she said in calm yet deliberate tones that were strong and intense and rang through every fibre of his soul with a strangely thrilling power of conviction :

“ No, Roger, no ! *You* can never lose *me*. You and I are one since that holy night ; one throughout all time and eternity. There can be no separation in spirit, and as, in the beginning, God made Man male and female, two in one, they were originally one soul, though in this visible world they are objectified as two halves, or two persons. You are the other half of my real self. You are the part of myself necessary for my perfect completion, to bring me back to my primeval perfection ; and I to perfect yours. As my soul has already recognised yours—or beheld her other self—*she* will never be content to have other than her own. In like manner for a few moments your own soul’s eyes were opened to see and know its true mate—or helpmeet—and know her as such. Therefore, though you may traverse the whole world, you may drift through the ages and along the great stream of time, yet you will never, never be satisfied till your soul is eternally united with mine. You do not realize it yet, your higher self has fallen asleep again for a season ; but she will awaken and then you will know that there is no other, there can be no other, in this vast universe for either of us. Although your soul has already mingled its being with mine and I have recognised my soul’s husband, yet you—*you*, Roger, do not know *me* yet. You are still wrapped in the sleep of sense-consciousness, and your soul is in prison till the veil shall finally drop from your eyes and you will awaken and lift your eyes to the spiritual heights above and behold with a clarified vision where your only soul-mate dwells, and then you will claim no other wife—you will have found your other half—your true bride.”

She paused and then her voice sank lower as she added, while gently withdrawing her hands from his clasp :

"Till then—well, till then, Roger, you and I will be dear friends, just friends only, for there is no middle course for us."

Before the man could find voice to reply, Edna was gone. She had silently left his side in the deepened gloom of the evening and passed through the open window into the room beyond, leaving him alone and bewildered by the tenor of her speech. He stood some time pondering her words in his heart, for they had awakened a strangely new vibration in his soul; and for many days afterwards he found himself recalling those mystic sentences, till gradually he made them his aim in life and considered it his most sacred duty to endeavor to live up to the ideal that Edna had set for him. From that day Roger Northbrook gradually changed from a merely intellectual man of the world into a more vitalized spiritual being, seeking the hidden springs of truth and wisdom within the secret recesses of his own complex being; seeking to know the truth for himself: the Truth that would make him free from the bondage of the senses, the illusions of what appeared to be life on this plane, but which is only the path through the wilderness that leads to the land of promise. This seeking he eventually found could only be effected by daily communion with his higher self in the silence. And so this man, wise as the world understands wisdom, began to tread the "path to the bush," which is ever the path of prayer, and always leads the seeking soul to the place where it may meet and have communion with the "I am that I am"—the Divine Lord of its own being. This in time would release the man's spiritual self from the bondage to the sensuous self (from its Pharaoh of the senses) and let it be free to worship its Lord God in a new land into which He would lead it. His soul would then be free to soar into the heights where it would find its true mate waiting for him, and recognising each other by a mutual impulse, their souls should rush together and close like an individual life and become welded into one perfect whole—the design of the mosaic would then be com-

plete and without a flaw—thus only would they, first as souls, and then as mortals, experience the true and holy joys of perfect union—the mystery of the Divine Marriage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

SERVICE FOR HUMANITY.

“What, in a world where cries for help
Must ever sound till sin shall cease,
Can be a goodlier work than this—
Griefs to assuage, joys to increase?
To offer cups of water pure
From Rocky Truth’s pure plenteous well,
To souls confused with feverish woes,
Unspoken and unspeakable.”

—LYNCH.

A month later Roger Northbrook had left on his long proposed trip to New Zealand which his accident had postponed. He intended to make a tour of the Pacific Islands and Tasmania and it would probably be six or nine months before he should return to Sydney. Prior to his departure he had, with Mr. Esbourne, made all arrangements regarding the fortune left by Reginald Vernon, to ensure it being profitably invested for Reggie, and the necessary means made available to carry out his education in the manner in which Roger knew Mysia would have wished it done, had she been spared to attend to it herself. Mr. Esbourne and Roger became trustees and the latter was his guardian, while Edna adopted the little lad as her own and he called her “Mama Edna,” a name she loved to hear from those lips, for it caused her long-hungry heart to throb with a new happiness; remembering that he might have been her own, her very own, had fate been kinder to her in the days of her early wifehood. But the mystic link that bound her erring husband’s child to this woman’s heart was one that could never be understood by any but herself and her God. It was one, however, that ensured to Reginald George Vernon the privilege of a good woman’s care and devotion, with

the tenderness of a mother's love till the end of his days, so that he really never knew the loss of that sweet little "mamma" who had kissed and fondled him in the days of his babyhood, when his little heart was equally divided between her and his dear "Granny Connors."

Life has many compensations for our sorrows, and what may seem to us a deep and irremediable affliction or a heavy loss frequently bears beneath its dark and brooding wings a message of hope, joy and peace. Thus we are led to be grateful even for our griefs, losses or disappointments, as they sometimes prove to be the friendly messengers of better things; the sweet harbingers of brighter days to dawn. Let us then receive our sorrows and trials as gifts from God's own hands, for He who is all-good giveth only good things to His children. If they fall short of being such to us, it is our own fault, seeing that we in our ignorance know not how to receive or use them. True it is that "even the choicest, richest gifts of heaven when perverted may become the most blighting curses."

By the middle of April the Esbournes were settled once more in the newly erected homestead at "Cum-booquepa" Station; but the family were now reduced to Mr. and Mrs. Esbourne, Leonard and Ella, since, as arranged, Edna, Frank and Gracie remained in Sydney. They were now settled in a pretty little villa in Darlinghurst, which Cyril had been instrumental in securing for them. It was named "Meta-ville," and as regards convenience and situation it was all that Edna desired. Though Frank dubbed it "pokey," this was because of the difference it presented after the wide area he had been in the habit of calling "home." Nevertheless, the young man was pleased to have his sisters in town with him, while the easy access to the city which the little place afforded made his stay in Sydney much more comfortable than it would otherwise have been. There was also the advantage of having so much of Cyril's society, and to the young clergyman also the presence of these

friends at "Metaville" was a pleasure that compensated him for much that he missed in his adopted home in this new land, where everything seemed strangely upside down, from the seasons to the doings of the people; indeed, he had come to the conclusion that he was not only in the Antipodes, but that everything there was decidedly antipodean.

He had, however, the exhilarating prospect that some day in the not far distant future his hopes of happiness would be realized and he should be privileged to claim Gracie Esbourne for his wife and take her back with him to his own native land as his fair Australian bride. Cyril had obtained the consent of Mr. Esbourne, and it was understood that when his term of office as curate of St. John's should have expired, and he had completed his three years there, they should be married. In the meantime they were well content to wait, and now that they saw a great deal of each other, this close communion did not tend to pall upon the young couple, rather did it appear to draw them into a deeper understanding of each other's character, nature and disposition that boded well for their happiness together in the future.

Edna had hailed this new joy that had come into Gracie's life with gladness of heart; she felt that her faith and prayer which had been instrumental in bringing about this little sister's recovery had brought with it a rich reward, for she would not alone be blessed but would be able to bless another with her new and regenerated life and strength. This also gave Edna greater encouragement to go on in the work her heart yearned to be engaged in, the power to render assistance to every needy one that came into her pathway of life. This desire brought with it its own opportunity, since now they were settled in the new home a sphere of labor opened up to them that had never presented itself before; then Edna and Grace Esbourne found that they had never really known what life meant in its truest sense for the great family of humanity, till

now they entered the ranks of workers in the Lord's vineyard.

They had been three months at "Metaville" before Edna ventured to engage in parish work or district visiting with Cyril. But in the meantime she had been carefully preparing herself for what she felt was her duty, indeed her peculiar mission in the future. It was not till Gracie was strong enough to go about alone, and even walk into the city without feeling weariness, that Edna announced that she would like to help him with his visiting. This offer he gladly accepted, and as the Misses Esbourne were regular attendants at the church and well-known to the rector, while Reggie was a pupil at St. John's day-school, they were warmly welcomed into the field, where there was work for so many more like them, and undoubtedly the good rector was delighted to find such earnest willing workers as these eventually proved themselves to be.

Edna had not discussed her advanced views with any of her new friends in her fresh sphere of action. She had taken Roger's words of warning to heart and decided that if she really wanted to effect any real good it is wiser not to shock those whom you desire to help or enlighten. Better is it to live the life of self-sacrifice and put the knowledge that is yours into daily practice, instead of making a great outcry; for it is useless to depend upon statements to convince the minds of others that you have found something they have missed in life. No, Edna now saw good in everything; she had learned that as God is All-Good, then the gradual growth of the race is good; the churches are every one good; the teachings given by all priests and parsons, when given in sincerity and truth, is assuredly good—even though it may not be in accordance with the greater light that had flashed across her own pathway. Everyone's form of belief is good if it satisfies the soul that holds it; it is truth to that soul and to it there is none higher at that stage of its growth, therefore to attempt to force upon that one

anything they do not feel the need of, or do not desire to accept, even though it may be good from our point of view, is a form of bondage quite as crippling as any other that exists. Bondage in religious beliefs is just as repulsive to a growing soul as bondage of the body was to the American negroes in the days of slavery. Truth is freedom. Truth then can only be freedom to a soul that feels it as such. Truth must be whole, complete, limitless, unchangeable, unshaken by the tests of the ages. Thus as Truth is immovable, we must come to Truth, we cannot drag Truth down to us, nor cut it and shape it to suit ourselves. Truth draws us up, up, higher, still higher, and every point we reach in that glorious ascent brings us into a purer atmosphere, affords us a wider and more comprehensive view of its limitlessness, its infinitude, till we begin to think, nay, to be convinced, that Truth fills all space, that it is omnipresent. Yes, verily, that *Truth is God!*

Then we know that every soul has some truth, and in the degree that he holds and uses his portion well, and faithfully acts up to the light that is revealed to him, that one has found just so much of God; and finding, has obtained his or her greatest good. More than that he cannot have till larger growth gives greater capacity, and thus we see that truth, like life, is eternal progress. So man seeks truth unceasingly to find that it really lies hidden within himself—to learn that its source is God and God its goal.

For these reasons—the fruits of her silent thought and convictions—Edna Esbourne had not made her New Thought ideas common property among the circle in which she now moved; and though Cyril was still an eager and receptive pupil of her Science of Life principles, he was quite content to imbibe them from Edna and discuss them with Gracie, but so far had not aired them abroad in the course of his parochial work. When Edna agreed to take up district visiting with Gracie as her helper and companion, she had made one stipulation, and that was that she be permitted to

do it in her own way and not be obliged to work in the way a guild is usually worked, her ideas being to visit the poor, the sick and the needy as a sister, as a woman to a woman: not to go to them as though she were conferring a favor by her visit; but to go lovingly, tenderly sympathetic—yea, even reverently and with the balm of love in her heart and the solace of kind and gentle words upon her lips. To help them by trying to comfort, relieve, admonish, instruct or encourage, as their needs might demand. Edna did not consider that because the poor *were* poor they were any the less entitled to respectful consideration than were the rich. She did not think that a district lady visitor should feel at liberty to enter their homes at any hour or time which suited her convenience and not theirs but that the poor sister in the All-Father's great human family was just as much entitled to be studied, and indeed more so, than those who were more fortunate, since her state was the more deserving of consideration, her troubles the more sacred, and therefore her feelings about them and her lamentable condition needed the greater delicacy in approaching her and offering remedies. Edna felt that a gentle courtesy was essential, and that the only way to reach the heart of the suffering human being was by showing a sympathetic interest in their disabilities and sufferings, a very real love for them as brothers and sisters of the Elder Brother in whose name we go to them, and of whom we profess to be followers and servants. Her method was to help them to help themselves and thus engender a proper self-respect, which gave them a feeling of independence that was never yet fostered by the bestowal of alms. To give as we would be given to is as necessary a maxim in life as the golden rule of conduct, "Do unto others as you would be done by." Yet, how many of us really know how to give? To give gracefully and in a manner that enhances the value of the gift by making the recipient feel that the giver is honored as much by the acceptance as is he or she by the bestowal. To give well is

an art that many of us would do well to learn, since to give in the spirit of true humility is to give a holy gift. It was such a gift that the Christ gave when He gave Himself to humanity. When we learn to give as God gives, our giving will bring a double blessing.

Edna Esbourne followed out these principles in the new sphere of work which destiny had brought to her hand in an unexpected way. She was loved and welcomed wherever she went, and her duties though self-imposed led her into many strange places of earth. Into sad and sorrowful homes, into dark and wretched hovels, into dens of vice and misery where the light of truth and purity had never consciously shone; and yet she did not go beyond the environs of the city in which she dwelt. She found the heathen at her own door, she learned that true missionary work can be done at home, and done well and effectively if the spirit of love prompts the sacrifice of self for the good of others. The heart of the woman ached for the sorrowful and sin-laden ones of earth, and she felt that she wanted to gather them into her arms and heal their myriad diseases of body and soul. She knew that the only balm was love, but even this was sometimes a stranger to the hearts of many with whom she came in contact in her daily rounds; more especially among the little erring sisters of the underworld. Here she met many who seemed to have lost the last spark of self-respect; to have ceased to know the meaning of the holy word love—for them it had taken quite another aspect and only meant degradation, dishonor and defilement or shame. Ah! the pity of it, that these temples of the living God, the Hidden Life, should become sinks of iniquity! That these houses not made with hands—these bodies built by the power of Thought—should be torn down by their possessors in such ruthless fashion or wanton ignorance.

Sometimes Edna felt that the task was one of herculean proportions when viewed as a whole, but at that time her faith was great and her trust in the power of Love to redeem and reclaim the lost ones was

infinite. She knew that just as a little leaven leavens the whole lump, so by steady, quiet, unremitting work and daily prayer she should effect some lasting good. Prayer was Edna's weapon at all times, but it was not just a multitude of words, but truest prayer, because of the strength of the desire, the holy aspiration that lifts the soul right into the presence of God, who, feeling through us, answers such petitions in a way that seems miraculous to us. The people whom Edna now moved amongst only understood prayer in the ordinary acceptance of the term, and they would have none of it. But they seldom heard it from the lips of this woman who moved among them with her gentle voice, loving sympathetic words, or tender glance. She *lived* what prayer *meant*. She never upbraided, never condemned, but helped where help was possible and that unostentatiously. She did not insist upon strict inquiries into particular cases or meddle in affairs that did not concern the outsider at all. The fact that the case was a needy one was all-sufficient for Edna. She gave money where the need was pressing, and though she certainly was not exempt from the experiences which all such giving ensures—that of meeting with many who were not alone undeserving, but also through ignorance dishonest—yet she did not withhold her hand on that account, feeling that it might happen that if, to save herself from being imposed upon, she refused any, then a deserving case might chance to go unaided.

On her visiting days, and among certain of her poor people, Gracie accompanied her sister, and the sweet face of the younger girl was welcomed and watched for by many a sad, sick and weary one. Gracie would often sit by their bedside and tell them of her own long, helpless years spent in bed, and of the wonderful recovery that had been wrought in her through faith in the power of God to heal his children to-day, just as He did through the Christ when, in the form of Jesus, He walked through the cities of Judea. The sufferers would listen to Gracie as long as she

would talk to them, and whenever Edna went to see them without her they would invariably ask for "Sister Grace." The two women now became such familiar figures in the back streets and lanes of the city that they were known as "Sister Grace" and "Sister Beulah," and this because they made it a rule to address every woman as sister, and not only in name did they term them so, but in act and deed they filled that place to them. None were too vile to touch, none too low to seek and save from their error ways; and though Edna founded no homes, nor organised any society for the purpose of rendering assistance to these unfortunates on life's sea (feeling, as she did, that there were more than enough of such places already), yet she had earned the grateful love of many a poor wanderer's heart as a reward for the long weary hours of the night during which she had walked those dingy streets and penetrated into the dark corners where vice and misery lurked by day, only to emerge when darkness covered the earth, a darkness that was as daylight in comparison to the stygian darkness that enveloped some of those souls.

Edna did not attempt to convert them, in the literal or orthodox rendering of the word. Her method was to teach them the power of right thinking; to impress upon them that as they would think pure, clean thoughts, so they would live clean, true lives. That what they were then—what the present conditions of their lives and surroundings were, was but the result of their past mode of thinking. That success was won by thinking thoughts of success, and failure was but a letting go of hope and endeavor. That sickness was also the result of the violation of Nature's just laws, a recognition of the power of disease over their bodies, and that if they harbored and encouraged sick and weak thoughts, so they built those conditions into their very flesh and showed it forth in their bodies as ill-health. She also urged the mothers to be as bright, cheerful and happy as their circumstances would allow, so that when their little ones came home to their arms they

would inherit the bright sunny nature that should be the birthright of every child of the Infinite Life and Love, whose Life was their life.

Of course, this woman found it very hard to inculcate her new teachings into those crushed and down-trodden mothers, who already had large families and perhaps a drunken husband, and with another little stranger coming home to add one more mouth to the circle already waiting to be filled, and that, too, when even now there was probably not sufficient to go round. Ah! it needed great patience and infinite strength, and enduring love of a high impersonal order, to persevere under such trying conditions among the poor—yes, even the poor of the city of Sydney.

Eventually Edna devised a scheme by which she might be able to teach these poor mothers how to improve their conditions and train their children, and also bring a little change and variety into their dull and colorless lives. It was one that suggested itself to her while visiting among them. Her experience had taught her that it was almost impossible to induce them to come to her at her house, even once a week either afternoons or evenings; there was always something to do, some tie to keep them in, and they apparently had no inclination to attend anything in the form of a meeting or class regularly. She had, however, noticed that when she visited any particular neighborhood on a certain day most of the women would come out to their doorsteps to watch her as she went from house to house where she was known and welcome. This fact made her try an experiment that came to her: it was to invite the various friendly neighbors to gather at one of their own homes, whichever was most convenient. On these days Edna and Gracie would take a large basket of sandwiches, fruit and cakes, which they spread out and invited all to partake of, and Gracie would wait on them while Edna talked. Her little lectures were so practical and easy to understand that the women really benefitted by them and began to look forward to her coming, and at length

considered it quite a privilege to be the one to receive her. Thus they were drawn together without leaving their homes or children and the little ones were brought with them and Sister Grace fed them with cake and fruit while the mothers were refreshed with mental and spiritual food. Then occasionally she would ask them to make an effort on a certain day to meet her in one of the parks or gardens, where she would have an impromptu picnic reading, and fill in the afternoon by a short talk, or read to them from the pages of an interesting book, which would give help and instruction as well as entertainment to her listeners. This method worked very well among a certain class, but failed with others. Yet it had the advantage of beguiling them from their squalid surroundings and dingy homes, while it also encouraged them to bring their little ones out into the pure air and bright sunshine, among the flowers and trees of park or waterside.

These most unusual tactics of Edna's certainly did not meet with the approval of her parents and friends when they heard of them, but as she did not make any fuss or public demonstration about her work, and was her own mistress entirely, they did not raise any serious objections to her methods of striving to bring a little of God's own sunshine and love into the hearts and lives of the poor either in body, mind or soul. Cyril Clifford thought Edna was just splendid and his best praises were given to her work, and his higher self was awakened to the beauty of her unselfish devotion to the cause she had taken up—just simple service for the Master, Christ. He heard her praises sung wherever he moved in his daily rounds, and so broad was her charity that she did not restrict herself to sect, creed, class, or color; she recognised all men as brothers; indeed, that a human being was in want or need of any kind was the "open, sesame!" to Edna's heart and hand. It thus happened that her help went far beyond the district which the Reverend Cyril Clifford's parish embraced, and he also, through her,

was brought into touch with many who were outside the fold of the church he served.

One cold wet day Cyril came hurriedly to "Meta-ville" and asked for Edna. When she appeared he told her that he wanted her to go with him at once to see a woman who was said to be dying in one of the back streets of Woolloomooloo. She was not one of his parishioners, nor had she ever been visited by Edna, but was a stranger who had come to lodge at the house of one whom Sister Beulah included on her visiting list, and she was ill when she arrived there, and appeared to be dying of consumption. That day she had been taken suddenly worse and the woman with whom she lodged had sent for the clergyman, and when he arrived there had asked him why he did not bring Sister Beulah with him; so he had returned for her at once. Without any delay Edna accompanied Cyril to the house where the dying woman lay.

It was a terrace house in a narrow back street not far from the Fish Markets, and when the young clergyman and his companion arrived at the door, a crowd of ragged little urchins were playing on the roadway and paddling in the gutters, which were now overflowing from the recent heavy showers. Everything in the vicinity was wretched in the extreme, dirty and uninviting. Then when the two visitors were ushered into the narrow dark passage and the front door closed upon them, the gloom of the place was such as to make it difficult to even feel their way up the narrow flight of stairs to the room where the sick woman lay fitfully moaning. Edna went in first and Cyril followed behind her, and after their eyes had grown accustomed to the gloom of the place they saw, on a stretcher bed covered with a couple of thin blankets and a colored counterpane, the form of a woman whose face was partially hidden among the dingy bedclothes and the masses of dark hair that fell over the soiled pillow on which her head rested. The faint light from a small window revealed the features but dimly, yet sufficient to show that though now thin and emaciated

they were those of a woman who could lay claim to some beauty in the past. When the two visitors entered the room she raised her head and opened her eyes languidly to gaze upon them, but almost at the same moment she was seized with a severe fit of coughing.

Edna immediately stepped to the bedside and, placing her arms around the thin shoulders of the sufferer, supported her gently till the paroxysm was over and then lifting a glass of water which stood on the table near, held it to her lips while she sipped a little and gradually recovered. When the poor creature's strength returned sufficiently for her to open her eyes again and speak, she thanked Edna faintly while she fixed her sunken eyes upon her visitor's face, which looked down upon her with pitying love depicted in its every lineament. Cyril Clifford stood at the foot of the stretcher-bed waiting till Edna should ask him to speak to the dying woman; but just then the sufferer gave a cry of mingled surprise and terror and, covering her face with her thin hands, moaned brokenly :

"This is my punishment! This is my punishment! Oh! God, pity me, have I not suffered enough?"

"What is the matter? What is distressing you, my poor sister?" enquired Edna anxiously, not understanding the cause of this sudden outburst.

"Retribution! retribution!" answered the woman bitterly, as she withdrew her hands from her face and looking up into Edna's eyes said in gasping tones, "Do you not know me? No? Ah! but you should have good reason to remember *me*, I fancy!"

"I do not recollect ever having seen you before. I ——," began Edna, but the woman interrupted as she raised her hand to touch Edna's white hair, saying :

"I am glad you do not, yet I think I had something to do with the cause of this being white. Yes, I am Nell Allen. I ——."

A low smothered moan, more like a cry of stifled

pain, escaped Edna's whitened lips as she grasped the meaning of the woman's words and recognized in this pale shrunken form the once buxom woman she had seen under circumstances that had power to cause her the most poignant heart-ache and to blight the first years of her girlhood's life. Oh! how many more ghosts of that dead past must she see rise before her? But this was the saddest and most wretched ghost of them all. Edna did not reply immediately and then when she did speak it was to ask Cyril to return to the house and tell Gracie to put up a few comforts and send them to her by the maid. The young curate saw at once that there was something the woman wished to communicate in which they did not desire him to be a hearer, and he therefore left the room without question.

When alone, the two women, thus strangely brought together once again, were silent for a few moments, then the sufferer made another attempt to speak, saying hoarsely and in rapid sentences:

"Yes, you know me now. It's no wonder you forgot me, I've changed so much since he left me. Left me still 'Nell Allen,' too. I took him from you then. I thought I had best right to him. I am the mother of his children, but he never gave me his name. No—no, Reg. Vernon—never—thought—me good enough—to be his wife—even —,"

Here another fit of coughing seized her and brought a rush of blood to her lips, and the clothes were stained with the crimson life current. With loving hands Edna ministered unto her and wiped the stained mouth with her handkerchief, raised the drooping head, and smoothed the matted hair off the brow, now wet and clammy with the death dews, while her heart ached with a deep and poignant pain that this should be another harvest for death's angel—a harvest to be reaped through the ill seed-sowing of her erring husband in the days of his youth and folly. Oh! those reckless sowings! Surely we would pause and withhold our hands if we could but see the agony of these reapings?

And when they prove to be such as this upon which Edna Esbourne was now gazing, how dire are the consequences to an immortal soul, how terrible to contemplate the penalties we incur as the fruits of such sowings when the harvests are garnered in !

When the paroxysm was over, Edna laid her down, saying gently :

" My poor little sister in the love of Christ, I cannot say how deeply grieved I am to find you in this state—this sore distress. Can you tell me anything about yourself so that I may be able to help you in some way ? You had children—where are they now ? "

" Yes, yes, you can help me, ' replied the sick woman faintly, while a feverish light beamed in her dark eyes as she fixed them upon Edna's face searchingly. " You—can tell me where I may find him—Reg. Vernon ? I—must—see him before I die. I want him to promise me to take care of my—his—children. He is their father and he must look after them when I am dead. Who has a better right ? Quick ! tell me truly, where can I find Reg. Vernon ? "

Edna did not reveal by voice or look what it cost her to answer that question, demanded in those terms from one who had a stronger claim upon the man she had called husband, than even she had, with all her love for him. She only continued to stroke the dying woman's hair from her feverish brow with her cool hand as she said solemnly :

" He has passed through the gates of the Silent City before you."

" What ! He is dead ! Do you mean he is dead ? " she gasped.

" Yes," assented Edna calmly, " he was burned to death in the great bush fires here, nearly two years ago. He has gone to reap the reward of the things done in this life, and learn, we may hope, to remedy his mistakes."

" Ah ! " with a deeply drawn sigh, " then I am too late to have my revenge. I have spent every

penny I possessed and all I could earn in trying to find him. I have searched everywhere I could imagine he would hide himself after he left me—alone—alone, to face the world as an outcast. And now—now I have failed. What shall I do with my children ? ” she moaned bitterly.

“ Where are your children ? ” asked Edna.

“ Here, with me. Downstairs somewhere—on the street, I suppose, where they will have to find their living when I am gone,” said the poor creature, in harsh resentful tones that jarred upon Edna’s sensitive nature and wounded her to the heart.

“ Do not worry,” she said soothingly, “ I will take care of your little ones. I will see that they are provided for and brought up respectably if you are taken from them. But—— ”

“ *You !* Y-ou ! Would you do this for me after what I did to you ? ” gasped the woman in astonished tones.

“ Yes, that is but little for me to do when Jesus did so much for us ! But you must not talk of dying now, you must try and make up your mind to get better. You should live for the sake of the children, if not for your own,” protested Edna.

“ Live ? No ! I do not want to live any longer. Not now I know he is gone. I meant to find him if he was on the face of the earth, and now I know he is under it I shall follow him there too. My soul, if it can live after I am dead, will follow his soul throughout eternity. I loved him. I need not deny it to you now, though you were his wife and I never was that. I loved him before he met you and after, too. I have always loved him and will love him to the end. Men and—and virtuous women—think that we—our sort—do not know how to be faithful. But I tell you now, I have loved no other man but Reg. Vernon, and I have loved him to my own ruin. Now I know where to find him I am content to go. Life has no charm for me. Not even the children can hold me. He was all the world to me, and now—I—have—no—world.”

Here another fit of coughing seized her and she was prostrated for some little time, till, rallying again, she gasped between her laboring breaths, while her eyes burned with excitement :

" You—you—when did you—see—him ? "

" I did not see him in life since ——." It was Edna's turn to pause and break her sentence. Then, recovering herself and suppressing her emotions, she continued, " Since that day in Perth when I first saw you. I only saw him in death."

" A-h-h ! "—in a tone of relief—" then he did not leave me to seek you ? " she questioned.

" No," was all that Edna answered. She would not wound the poor faithful heart by saying that he had sought and found another, and that he had made that other his lawful wife and now lay by her side in Wagga-Wagga Cemetery, while she, Edna, cared for their little son. It was not necessary to further hurt the already bruised and broken heart by information of that character.

" You—you—said you would take care of my children ? Did you mean it ? Have you no grudge against me ? " the sick woman whispered, her voice now grown fainter since the excitement had sapped her small stock of strength.

" No, indeed I have nothing but a great love and pity for you," asserted Edna. " I only wish that I had known of your distress sooner, I might have been better able to help you, and perhaps you might have been restored to health and strength again. Even now it may not be too late if you will but make your mind up that you will get better, and I will look after you till you are able to help yourself."

" No, no," protested the woman, " I don't want to get better. I'm done for and I know it. The sooner the end comes the better now, and—and I don't think it's very far off."

Another fit of coughing here seized her and this was so bad that Edna had to call the landlady to assist her with the poor gasping creature whose storm-tossed

soul was taking such a reluctant departure from its earthly temple, where it had dwelt so long in much turmoil and bitterness.

When the dying woman recovered sufficiently to be spoken to Edna asked her if she would like to have the children brought up to kiss her farewell, for they all knew she was dying. She assented with a movement of the eyelids. Then the two little ones, a boy and girl now in their teens, came into the room and Edna received them kindly and bade them be very quiet and not cry over their mother's going from them. They were nice-looking children in form and features, but poverty had not tended to improve their general appearance, nor had the life they had lately been leading, wandering from place to place with their sick mother, conduced to good manners or character. But if it was not too late, Edna considered there was fairly good ground to work on, and she resolved that she would do her best to make these two children worthy members of society, and that they at least should not bear the brunt of their father's sins in their future lives if she could manage to prevent it. They seemed very much attached to their mother and hung around her bed with tearful eyes, and their but half-suppressed sobs appeared to distress the sick woman so much that Edna had to send them downstairs again.

The Reverend Cyril at this juncture returned with the maid and a basket of delicacies, but before they had time to administer any stimulant or nourishment to the invalid, another struggle for breath and life took hold upon her and Edna ran forward and lifted her in her arms while it lasted, and at a signal from Edna, Cyril knelt by the bedside and prayed for that departing soul—prayed, too, as he had probably never prayed before. Edna's eyes were humid with tears while she listened to the earnest words of the young clergyman as the church form of prayers for the dying fell from his lips. Then there was a few moments' silence in the room, which was broken by Edna whispering words

of comfort and hope to the gasping creature on her bosom, who now seemed to be struggling to speak. Edna bent her head and turned her ear to the white lips to hear the words spoken brokenly :

" For-give me ? "

" I do, indeed I do. I never in reality had anything to forgive you for, my little sister in Jesus' love, and God has forgiven you long ago."

" Kiss me. Good-bye ! I'm g-o-i-n-g."

Edna laid her lips to the thin hollow cheek and murmured softly, " Good-bye. Go home to your rest, trusting in His great love. His arms of Love are enfolding you now. His angel of Peace is covering you with His everlasting wings. Peace, peace, little sister, to your onward speeding soul."

Then with a faint sigh and a flickering smile upon her lips the tired eyelids drooped over the sunken eyes and gently the soul of this woman sped forth to seek its rest in the bosom of Infinite and All-forgiving Love.

Reverently, Edna laid her down and, kneeling by the side of the young curate, who had remained praying silently while the soul took its flight, Edna joined him in prayer for this wanderer gone out upon another stage of its soul-journey. They followed it with loving thoughts of peace and strength and entrusted it to the tender love of the Lord Christ and into the hands of an Almighty Father. Then Edna rose and arranged the clothing about the still form, and stooping kissed the chill brow of the woman whom the man she had once called her husband had betrayed and abandoned. Then turning, she left the room, and with the Rev. Cyril Clifford proceeded home, but during that midnight walk not one word broke the solemn silence consequent upon that deathbed scene.

All arrangements for the funeral were made and the expenses thereof defrayed by Sister Beulah, whom the women in the alley called a " perfect saint " for they felt that her goodness was different to that of others who came to talk to them about religion. They thought so much of the dead woman being given a decent burial

and stated "that the poor thing would have been buried by the parish if Sister Beulah had not seen things done properly."

They were ignorant of the mystic link that binds all humanity as one great family in God; and knew not that as we are hurting or wounding one little sister or brother in that family we are inflicting pain upon ourselves and that some others of us have to bear the burden of wrongdoing and bind up or heal the wound another hand has so wantonly inflicted.

Edna had the children of Nell Allen placed in a good home in the country so that they might be removed far from the associations of city life and its influences. They were both instructed in farm and dairy work, so that they should help swell the little band of settlers who shall yet prove to be the back-bone of our vast Continent and open up its internal and natural resources. She never failed to take a very real interest in their welfare up to the time when they were grown to full manhood and womanhood and settled comfortably in life for themselves; this as much for their poor mother's sake, or, perchance, as an atonement for their father's sins.

This act then was the closing scene in that drama of Edna Esbourne's life in which Reginald Eugene Vernon had any part. Here the last ghost of that past was laid for ever; the dead past had buried its own dead and Edna Beulah Maya Esbourne stood forth a resurrected soul, purified by suffering, justified by good works, and fully prepared to be sanctified to the new and fuller life that awaited her in the future, and on the threshold of which she was now standing.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LOVE'S BRIMMING CUP.

"Measure thy life by loss instead of gain.
Not by the wine drunk, but by the wine poured forth ;
For love's strength standeth in love's sacrifice,
And whoso suffers most has most to give."

—E. H. KING.

Spring had blossomed into summer, and summer with all her glories had faded, and waned into autumn, and now Eastertide was at hand. Nearly three years had slipped away since Edna took up her work among the slums and by-ways of the city. Cyril Clifford's term of service at St. John's was almost completed, after which he would marry Grace Esbourne and take his departure for England, with a promise given that he would return to Sydney and settle down there after he had introduced his young bride to his own people. Roger Northbrook was still travelling and they received letters from him at intervals, but no word yet of his returning to Sydney. Frank Esbourne had passed his final examination with credit and was going back to Wagga Wagga to take up a practice which his father had secured for him there. The lease of the little villa had expired, as the owner had returned from abroad, and they must vacate "Metaville." Edna met Miss Glenroy and was very much impressed with the strong self-reliant personality and calm well-poised mind. She was an elderly maiden lady and was also a staunch adherent to New Thought principles, and Edna saw the effect of those principles well evidenced in her new friend, to whom she was greatly drawn in a degree that was even a surprise to herself ; for Edna was not one to make friends of women outside her own immediate circle, and few even of those who called themselves her friends ever really knew the inmost thoughts and feelings that so frequently stirred her. But her first impression, when she knew Miss Glenroy intimately, was that she was like unto "a strong tower." The simile was good, for such she indeed proved to Edna Esbourne during the next few months of her work in

Sydney. They grew together in thought and friendship through their mutual love for the grand new truths which they had both discovered, and as Miss Glenroy was well advanced in the basic principles of the Science of Being, and had a very clear grasp of the subject, she was of great assistance to Edna. She also possessed a very fine library of New Thought books, all of which she placed at Edna's disposal; therefore these two very dissimilar, yet deeply earnest, women were united heart and soul in the cause they loved, and determined to do all in their power to teach and spread these truths to the multitudes, for they were convinced that they were the truths which would heal the body, strengthen the mind, and unfold the soul of man.

Miss Glenroy saw in Edna Esbourne a warm enthusiast, and an energetic worker for any high or noble principle she might adopt or feel strongly upon. She therefore conceived it possible that she might render her much assistance in her chosen work for the uplifting of humanity, and the amelioration of many of its ills. She was a lady of independent means and at perfect liberty to give her whole time and attention to the cause into which she had thrown her lot some years since, when, like many others, she found the church too crippling for her expanding soul. It was chiefly through her that Edna was introduced into a little circle of advanced thinkers, students of the New Truths who were in the habit of meeting once a week for study and discussion. Edna with her new friend, Miss Glenroy, became regular attendants at these meetings and were eventually enrolled as members. Here Edna was able to glean much of an enlightening character by her contact with persons whom she met there, and who were all in more or less advanced stages of soul growth; but what was of the greatest assistance to her was the discussions and papers which were prepared and read at the meetings. By this means Edna gained confidence in speaking before strangers, and so well did she equip herself with knowledge on her subjects, and so clear and concise her enunciation of

her views, that she soon began to be looked upon by her fellow students as one of their brightest speakers.

At length she was asked to deliver an address to the members of the class only. This she did so ably and with so much success, that Miss Glenroy persuaded her to announce a public lecture in the hall for the coming Easter Sunday. At first she was diffident as to her power to carry through so much, but her friend encouraged her and the announcements were made. She felt that her own people would disapprove of this new step she was taking, but she remembered the Master's words to His disciples, that "He who loveth father or mother more than Me, is not worthy of Me." Besides, she had the strong support of her friend Miss Glenroy, who stood by her faithfully, and helped her by her calm and quiet presence when she had momentary doubts of herself. It was such a great thing to Edna Esbourne at this time to have someone near her who had faith in her; someone who believed in her ability to be and to do what she undertook; one who not only spoke her belief but acted up to it in every detail of her daily life; made it evident in every phase of her own existence; showing forth what great things the Truth had done for her.

The days of preparation for the lecture were anxious ones for Edna, since she was eager to do well and to handle her subject ably and clearly, yet not to make it too abstruse. Seeing her anxiety one day during a call she made upon Edna, her friend said:

"My dear, cease trying. You are distressing yourself too much over the subject. I assure you that you will do much better if you will try and forget it till the night of the address. Then go with your whole mind open to the inspiration of the Spirit, and when you open your lips to address your audience, you will be given the words to speak, just as you have always done. Can you not trust the Infinite Spirit now as ever before?"

"Yes, yes, I certainly will," exclaimed Edna. "I see now what is the matter with me; I have been

trying to do this myself, forgetting that 'I of myself can do nothing.'"

"That is it, dear Miss Esbourne," assented her friend. "You need have no fear that the Father will not finish the work He has begun through you, if you will but let Him use you as a channel of Love and Truth to the hungry souls of the Great Orphan, Humanity."

"Thank you, thank you! my ever dear friend," said Edna in a grateful voice, as she kissed her new friend good-bye at the door. "I shall remember your words and look for you early at the hall to-morrow evening, for I feel I shall require to lean upon my 'Strong Tower'."

Easter Sunday morning dawned bright and beautifully fine, a fitting day for the work Edna had set herself to do, and a symbol of that Eastern morning nineteen hundred years ago. For this auspicious occasion Edna had chosen as the subject of her address that night the story of "The Resurrection." This was also selected because Gracie had written out a beautiful vision she had had on the previous Good Friday night, and with which Edna was much impressed. She therefore asked Gracie if she would read it before the audience at the opening of her meeting that Sunday night, and to this Gracie agreed. Edna had not invited any of her own particular friends to the meeting and of course the Rev. Cyril could not leave his church duties had he been so disposed; but it is not certain what his inclinations upon the subject were, for he did not express an opinion even to his betrothed, and when Gracie announced her intention of taking part in Edna's service that night, Cyril did not offer any protest, only kissed her gently as he took his departure and said he would look in on his way home to hear how they had got on.

The two sisters started out about half-past six and walked down to the hall together, and during the course of that short distance they did not converse, but a reassuring squeeze of Gracie's hand as it leaned

upon Edna's arm told the elder sister that the little one was giving her of her best thoughts to help and encourage her in the task which lay before her. They were met at the hall by Miss Glenroy, who was especially pleased to see Gracie with Edna, and more so when she learned that she had promised to read her vision as an opening paper before the address, and hoped the frail girl would not break down. But this young maiden was stronger in spirit than they then gave her credit for, as her future life would prove; but she was in that stage of unfoldment which resembled a lovely opening bud that does not yet know its own glorious possibilities nor its enfolded beauties.

Edna had selected for this night's wear a plain black velvet robe, which fitted her well-moulded figure to perfection. At her throat and wrists there were soft ruffles of white chiffon—no ornaments—none but those which St. Peter recommends as the best adornment for women. Her beautiful silver hair was piled high upon her head and brushed back from her brow in heavy natural waves. A small black velvet bow rested upon the side of that snowy pyramid that crowned her as with an aureole of light, and threw into relief her fine features and sweet womanly expression of countenance, on which the sentiment of Love—impersonal love—was writ large.

The platform was decorated by loving hands with white roses and arum lillies, in honor of Eastertide. When Edna made her appearance the hall was nearly full, and the people were still trooping in so that there seemed a likelihood of a large attendance; doubtless though, a number came from curiosity to hear what a woman had to say on the subject announced, while there was also a large percentage of men present. Stepping to the front of the platform, Edna held up her hands and voiced the Lord's Prayer as an opening to the service; then she quietly told them of the vision which would be read before the lecture began, and with a few well-chosen words introduced her sister Grace. The young girl came forward attired in pure white, her

lovely golden ringlets now drawn up to the crown of her head, haloing her sweet face, while a few straggling curls fell upon the nape of her neck and over her blue-veined temples. She was like an annunciation lily among the lillies on the platform that evening, so beautiful did she appear in her virgin purity as with modest mien she stood before her first audience and began to read from a manuscript in her hand the vision, which was entitled :

LOVE HANGS BLEEDING.

" AN EASTERTIDE VISION OF LOVE AND MERCY.

" Prologue.—The dawn was just tingeing the east with a crimson and golden glow and spreading over the distant hills a mantle of rainbow hues, mingled with a soft opalescent light, cast by the lingering shades of night which seemed loth to depart before the coming of the Glory Car in which was enthroned the Prince of Day. He came riding in regal splendor over the verge of the distant horizon, while Nature in maiden modesty clothed her face in rosy blushes at his appearing and welcomed his august coming with myriad tokens of delight. Fair Nature loves her lord the Sun, and well repays his tender care and generous bounty, which he ever pours with lavish hands upon his beauteous bride, bathing her in light, warmth and beauty; enfolding her and her numerous progeny within his revivifying beams, while he bestows upon all his infinite life and love."

As Gracie finished this opening paragraph, which was the prologue to her vision, she lifted her eyes from the paper she held in her fingers, and, pausing for a moment as if in hesitation, but in reality to rally her courage, she let the hand that held the manuscript fall by her side and, lifting her eyes above the heads of her listeners, she began to speak, and as she did so it seemed as though she were again seeing with her mental vision the things which she now so vividly described. Every eye was centred upon that young form and not a sound broke the silence of the room as the voice of the girl was heard rising and falling in musical cadences as she

rendered her beautifully vivid contribution to the service of that Easter evening, and not a sentence was lost to the eager listeners from the first word to the last.

“Behold! The sun is risen. But what vision is that I see on yonder distant hill-top which the morning light reveals?”

“It is a pure white cross which stands out in clear relief against the crimsoning sky, bathed in the light of early dawn. A solitary cross; and on it hangs a partially shrouded form out-stretched and nailed by feet and hands unto that tree of wood. The head is raised, and on it rests a thorny circlet, whose cruel spikes have pierced the tender brow of flesh, while great red drops of blood are falling, like ruddy tears, adown those pale drawn cheeks, and for a moment linger, as quivering rubies, upon the long fair beard, that veils the chin and mouth. From out a gaping wounded side there also flows a slender stream that runs continuously, though now ebbing, now flowing, as the pulsations of the life currents supply it, for it comes from the great strong heart within, a heart throbbing with love incarnate, even in those last throes of agony—a heart that will not die.

“It is the Great Heart of LOVE, and this is LOVE Himself Who hangs bleeding there on that white cross on yonder lonely hill.

“See, the dawn grows clearer, the morning brighter; and what do I now behold? A great multitude—a vast company of people—all gathered in the valley at the foot of the hill. Some are standing, some are kneeling, while others are prostrated upon their faces before the tragic scene which is being enacted above them. There is a great hush, an awe rests upon this mighty crowd, a holy calm is over all; for a solemn hour is this.

“Incarnate LOVE is slowly dying—dying on yonder cross—and His death means life for them. Oh! the silence is awful, almost oppressive, for even

Nature seems to have paused in her revels and hushed her voice of gladness, holding her breath as it were to listen and watch the close of this great tragedy.

“Hark! Now the silence is at length broken. A clear voice cries aloud in tones of ecstatic emotion and thrilling pathos: ‘Oh! LOVE Divine! O! Love Divine! Thy love is ours, our love is thine. Look! all ye children of earth; lift up your eyes and behold the sacrifice of LOVE. LOVE is yours. LOVE is All. LOVE is eternal, infinite, immortal. LOVE itself will never die, though its pitcher be broken at the fountain. Come! drink of LOVE’S life and live for ever!’

“Then I saw a tall form arise from a kneeling posture at the foot of the white cross, and lo! it was the graceful figure of a woman, clad in flowing robes of snowy white, but here and there upon those garments were spots of blood, which had dripped from the bleeding form above, and marred their virgin purity with a bright crimson stain. As she rises to her full height, she bows her head and reverently kisses the bleeding feet nailed to the wood, then lifting her face, gazes long and earnestly into the pitiful eyes of LOVE who looks down upon her in silent agony, awaiting the consummation of Love’s great sacrifice.

“Now she slowly and sorrowfully turns her face towards the waiting multitude and, looking again, I know this woman is MERCY, who is ever LOVE’S handmaiden. In her right hand she holds a silver bowl, which, lifting in view of the people, she fills beneath the trickling stream of blood which flows from the great throbbing heart of Love. When this bowl is filled to the brim she turns to the people and, raising her arm on high, holds out the brimming cup and cries with a loud and ringing voice:

“Give ear, all ye nations, listen, all ye people of earth, hear the message of LOVE. Come all ye that are weary and heavy-laden with trouble, grief and woe; all that are sick and burdened with sin, who faint in the highways of the world; come unto LOVE and you

shall have Peace, and there find rest for your souls. Ho ! everyone that thirsteth, come, drink of this living stream, this water of life, for he that drinketh shall surely live—yes, *live !* Drink, drink, then, all ye Sons of Men—come, drink and live for ever.”

“ As Mercy’s voice dies away I hear a smothered sob arise from that vast multitude and there is a stir like the waves of a troubled sea before a storm. Gradually, one by one I behold them rise and step forward—kneeling at Mercy’s feet, they drink from the flowing bowl ; and as each one drinks it appears to me as though he were transformed into a pure spiritual being ; by a process that is almost imperceptible their forms change into a glorified body that resembles the body in which the disciples beheld the risen Christ. But I notice, too, that each one becomes invisible to the others, for not one of those who drink from the cup return to the waiting throngs below. Once they have tasted the Cup of LOVE’S life-blood they are separated from the rest for ever ; and the only way for those who are left behind to rejoin their friends is to likewise drink. There is but one path to reunion, and that path is through the Cup of Sacrifice. But I see there are many who will not drink ; many, too, who are holding others back who apparently desire to drink of the life-giving cup. Some are clinging to their friends in tears and sobbing, thinking that because others who have tasted the cup have passed out of their sight they are gone for ever, or are what they term ‘ dead.’ Wives are clinging to husbands ; husbands clasping wives and children in a close embrace, while some are struggling to get free from those encircling arms ; now some are successful in breaking away from their detaining grasp and rushing to Mercy’s feet, kneel there, and partake of the proffered cup, ere their dear ones of earth can prevent them, and once the draught is quaffed they no longer have any power to interfere or hold them back. Yonder I see mothers clinging to their little ones, who, seeing the shining bowl glittering in the rays of the sun, are attracted by its brightness

and strive to break away and also taste the crimson liquid it contains. Then when it happens they are successful in eluding the vigilance of their parents, and, escaping to Mercy's feet, also taste, those parents, in their sorrow and loneliness, step forward with bowed head and reverent mien, to take of that same cup to which a little child has led them, and are thus purified and sanctified by suffering, and now arise glorified for ever.

"Still I see there are numbers who will not drink, and are holding out on the very outskirts of the crown, deaf to the persuasions of friends or companions, and indifferent to Mercy's repeated calls. Yet through all this long day does LOVE hang bleeding, and Mercy stand pleading. Yet the crowds are still dense and there are many thousands who have not yet tasted of LOVE'S life-blood.

"A great sorrow and sadness steals over me and I yearn with an intense longing to go forward and drink, but I am powerless to move. I wish I might also cry aloud with Mercy's cry of invitation, and urge these people to drink and live—to drink quickly while LOVE yet lived to give His crimson life-tide for them. To drink while yet it is day and ere the darkness close around them forever; for I can see that those who now refuse to drink are rejecting LIFE, Eternal Life, now and for ever. 'Ye would not come to Me that ye might have Life.' Love Himself cried those words aloud, in the voice of Jesus; and to-day LOVE calls again, but, alas! 'Ye will not give ear, nor heed His call.'

"But before I can open my lips to speak, lo! a great trembling has seized the hill upon which I stand, the sun sinks in sudden darkness, without any warning, while a strange mysterious light envelops the earth as with a mystic pall. Vivid lightnings and rumbles of distant thunder peals are heard; and in the midst of this strange scene the bleeding form upon the white cross stands out in bold relief against the threatening background of the darkening sky. The multitudes

are terrified, and run hither and thither, distracted with fear ; many crying and wailing piteously ; while above the noise of their shrieking, shouting and sobbings, mingled with the roll of thunder crashes, pleading cries and piteous entreaties arise to Mercy for help and pity :

“ ‘ Give us to drink ? Give us to drink ! We will drink *now* of Love's life-blood. We will drink and live—*live*—Oh ! let us LIVE ! ’ they plead.

“ But Mercy makes no response, and letting the silver bowl which was filled with the last draught of that crimson life-giving fluid, fall from her hands, behold ! she turns now to the white cross, and, throwing her arms around it, kneels at its base with bowed head and drooping form, awaiting the end. Still the people clamor, but Mercy heeds them not. *It is too late—TOO LATE !*

“ Now see ! With a fearful shudder the ground beneath my feet has parted, and a mighty chasm gapes between the multitudes and that scene on yonder lonely hill-top. A gulf that cannot now be bridged. Darkness covers the whole scene as with a sable shroud, while with a long, low, quivering cry there falls upon my ears the last words from LOVE'S dying lips—*It is finished !* ”

When the voice of the maiden ceased a deep silence brooded over that assembly—a silence that was most impressive, since it lasted even after the last words were uttered, “ *It is finished.* ” It was not until the speaker herself, aroused from the entranced state in which she seemed to have been held all through that wonderful recital, and recalling all her senses, which had seemed for the time to have been focussed in her beautiful eyes—let her gaze once again rest upon the upturned faces of the people ; and with a deeply drawn sigh resumed her usual calm and modest demeanour : not till then was there a move or even a stir in that assembled crowd. Then the sigh which fell from Gracie's lips seemed to be re-echoed through the length and breadth of the hall like a sob that

passed through the hearts of the entire congregation, and awakened them from the tense listening attitude they had assumed during the whole of that wonderfully realistic recital: that vision of the world's tragedy, and the prophecy of the end that is now so near, given from the lips of this fair virgin, whose life and general appearance made her seem more like a visitant from another sphere than a creature of flesh and blood. She was indeed a handmaiden of the Lord God, one of those on whom it was declared "the Lord would pour out in those days of His Spirit, and they should prophesy."

Indeed, so graphically had Gracie described her wonderful vision that all through the recital the people could imagine they were really watching every detail of that tragedy, seeing it clearly depicted through the medium of this maiden's eyes. The tension was relaxed when Gracie moved to the back of the platform to allow her sister to step forward. As she did so there was an attempt made at the back of the hall, from some more appreciative than artistic listeners, to applaud the recitation; this, however, was instantly suppressed by a unanimous "hush-h!" voiced by the majority, who felt that it was too solemn a subject to treat in so commonplace a manner; indeed, several who were more emotional than others were furtively wiping their eyes to which the tears had sprung as they saw through the occult vision of the young reciter the sad scene her words so faithfully depicted; till their own hearts were stirred within them by this unusual rendering of the story of Calvary.

Gracie was vibrating in every fibre of her being with the thrilling emotions her vision stirred within her soul, and the tension she was under during its recital. She was greatly relieved when Edna (who was known to the audience as "Sister Benlah"), to break the spell that appeared to rest upon the congregation, gave out the well-known hymn, in which they could all join in singing and relieve their pent-up feelings. Then to the swell of the organ the whole company arose and

sang the stirring words of "Lo ! in the grave He lay." It seemed to soothe their over-strung feelings and made them partakers in that wondrous sacrifice of Love ; and as the triumphant notes of the chorus, " Up from the grave He arose," burst forth in one united paeon of rejoicing, it seemed as if this glorious consummation at the end of that great tragedy was compensation for all its shame and sorrow. The singing of this grand hymn was a suitable preparation for Sister Beulah's address on " Resurrection," so when the people had settled down once again in an attentive attitude, she began her address by saying interrogatively :

" Resurrection ! What is Resurrection ? It is a rising again from the dead. Now note that it is not only a rising from the dead, but a rising *again*. This pre-supposes that that which rises has risen before ; but how often is not stated. The word *again* is the key to the true meaning of the word *Resurrection* as applied to the Soul of man. Man's soul is man's power to think, it is the hidden God within each, therefore man's soul is the seat of Infinite Intelligence, or God in the highest expression on earth ; and *being* such, has in its progress through the ages risen many times from the dead of materiality, and will continue to rise again, and *again*, till, as expressing the Perfect Idea of God—the Image—it eventually reveals the complete and perfected likeness which is known as the Christ. David says in the last verse of the seventeenth Psalm, ' As for me, I will behold Thy face in (or through) righteousness, I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.' This likeness is the only finality for the soul and it must therefore be continually resurrected till it be purged from everything that is unlike its Source—God, the Everlasting Father of all Souls. It thus ' dies daily ' to the things of earth, or the lusts of the flesh, so that it may rise again at the last day, that is at its final resurrection, to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, which is representative of the perfected mortal ; as such it alone can reveal the

immortal, the Son of God, who is only seen through the Son of Man.

"You will observe that there is a trinity in unity in these three names given to this perfect Man: Lord-Jesus-Christ! The significance is such as to tell us why Jesus said, 'I and the Father are one.' For the *Lord* is representative of the Lord God of the second chapter of Genesis, Who is the Heavenly Father spoken of, and first called the Father by Jesus of Nazareth. Then the name *Jesus* is representative of the Son of Man, who is made by that Lord God and called Adam, or God's expression of Himself through flesh or mankind; while *Christ* is representative of the Son of God, and is actually such, because He is the perfect manifestation of that Spiritual Father from whom He sprang and whose immortal Son He is; therefore Very God individualized, or objectified through the veil of flesh. So He is One with that Father, and having attained that perfection inherited from the beginning, He appropriates the full title of every Son of God, the title of 'Lord Jesus Christ,' of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, after that same Father whose first-begotten Son Jesus is our Elder Brother.

"Now let us read in the 20th chapter of John what is said about this Risen Life."

(After reading the chapter through, the speaker continued.)

"Christ is risen! Yea, verily, He is risen.

"This is the Russian formula for the Easter greeting when the kiss of peace is exchanged. Now, when on this anniversary of the resurrection of the historical Jesus we read these words, let us ask ourselves if Christ is indeed risen to us? Or is He yet even born in the manger of our own human nature? Do we indeed recognise that perfect Son of God, named Christ, dwelling within us and ruling our lives? Before this can come as a certainty to us, we must know and understand why "the Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him." This going is shown in every act of Calvary's

tragedy which this Easter festival celebrates. But, remember if you are not prepared to go through the entire process within your own souls, then the crucifixion of Jesus and the resurrection of Christ has no real meaning for you. Its sacred symbolism is lost, and the whole tragedy is seen but as the harrowing spectacle of the cruel murder of a good man; while the last act of the drama reveals the overcoming of the world's greatest enemy, the last one to the progress of the race—Death. And that, too, through this chief actor, Jesus, who triumphed over all His foes and showed forth Man's dominion and God's glory: He made it possible to conquer even death, and when we can believe a thing possible for one, the more likely we are to accept it as probable for others and eventually for ourselves, even though this recognition on the part of humanity is necessarily slow. Yet what Jesus did we can also do, *if we will*. But even this great moral lesson is of no avail if we see it only with the eyes of sense. We must behold it with our inward spiritual vision, and there see the chief actor in that drama as *ourselves*. Each one of us must go through every scene in that life tragedy as the Master did, till we attain to the final overcoming of the Christ-Man, Who is the model for our guidance.

“There must be first the early obedience and subjection to those in authority over us while we are still children, or initiates. This means the following out to the letter the moral laws; the letter of our lives must be perfect before we can give birth to the divine life. John the Baptist must come before Jesus—or, the perfect word and act must precede the perfect life. There must be the early baptism which establishes our position in the eyes of the world and is an open confession that we have resolved to walk boldly in the way that is taught us in the Law of God, which is written on the fleshly tablets of our hearts. Then there is sure to be the temptation in the wilderness of sense, when we have to resist the three cardinal vices by which the race have fallen into error and come

short of the glory of God. These are appetite, vanity and ambition, and are symbolised by Satan, or the sense-promptings of the Adam Soul, which said to Jesus: 'Command that these stones be made into bread,' when He hungered. Again, 'Cast thyself down from this peak, because He has given His angels charge over thee,' and lastly, 'All the kingdoms of the world shall be yours.' But though Jesus knew He had gained the power to do all these things he resisted the temptation to apply these occult powers to evil purposes, and so overcame the Tempter. This must be our work also before we are fitted to go out 'in the power of the Spirit' to offer ourselves in loving service to humanity. Then many mighty works follow, as He promised that 'greater works than these ye see Me do shall ye do also,' for 'these signs follow them that believe' that these things are possible, and to those who trust themselves and do it in the name of their great Exemplar.

"Then we too must eat the last supper, for this is representative of our passing on to a higher stage of growth: putting off the last and final expression of the perfected human, to put on the first and immortal manifestation of the divine. Just as the infant is absorbed into the child, the child into the boy, the boy into the youth, and finally the last passover is eaten when the youth is absorbed by the full-grown manhood and is then conscious of all its inherent powers; the powers which that condition unfold.

"After the last supper follows the long night vigil in Gethsemane's dark garden, where in our hours of bitter sorrow and loneliness we cry from our heart, overwhelmed with grief, 'My soul is exceedingly sorrowful.' Or, when all earthly help or hope is gone, we kneel alone—ah! how much alone when we choose to tread the narrow path of the initiate—when friends have forsaken us in our hour of greatest need, as His disciples did; when those we have loved and sacrificed ourselves for have proved unfaithful and traitorous, like Judas; then in that loneliness great sobs of agony

are wrung from our lips and we exclaim, 'Let this cup pass.' We will always be much, yea, very much alone the more we grow into the spiritual life, away from the human, for we will be so little understood even by those who think they know us best. It is but a few, a very few, you'll meet on the hill-top, while thousands congregate on the plains. But, if we even meet one strong aspiring soul there, then there is ample compensation for the loss of the many we have left behind us who know not the joy and glory of striving and achieving.

"This demonstration must be made by us through that divinity within which is sleepless in the midst of sleeping sense; in the silence of our souls while all the mortal impulses are wrapped in slumber. We travail in spiritual birth alone, for those whom we love best and whom we think love us are often indifferent to our pangs, and our soul agonies are to them but a species of madness. They know nought of our pains, but are locked within the cold embrace of sense-consciousness, and the things of sense are to them alone visible, while we are very much awake to the things of the Spirit. We ask, 'Could they not watch with us one little hour.' Nay, they sleep on while this tragedy of the soul is being enacted at midnight, till deliverance comes and we are able to say, 'Not my will, but Thy will be done.' We then have triumphed over sense and sensuous desire for ever, we have become able to obey the highest within us—to do His holy (whole) will. Then we do not mind the loneliness, for we add, 'Sleep on and take your rest, the hour is come.' The remainder matters not. It is but the closing scenes of which this hour in dark Gethsemane's garden was the forerunner; the other could not be, had this overcoming not been first manifested there in silence and alone. This was the second wrestling match between the Son of God and the Son of Man, of which Jacob and the angel were the Old Testament type; but this Son of God was gloriously triumphant and stood forth a victor for evermore.

"Now we have to face the rabble, the cries and

jeers of those who do not recognise the divine man, who do not see anything but the mortal and fleshly temple. We too must stand before Pilate's seat, and he will sit in judgment upon the Son of God and demand proofs of truth regarding his claim to power and kingship; judging us by what we have been, said, or done in the past: not by what we in reality and in essence are. The world is Pilate's judgment hall for us to-day, and it will be very cruel to those who elect to think and act contrary to its accepted rules and customs. It will spit upon and revile the one who dares to claim the lost inheritance of the seed of Abraham—Faith—or assert their sonship with the divine Father of all souls. We must therefore be content to be despised and rejected like as He was, because 'if we were of the world the world would love its own.'

"Then follows the crown of thorns. This also must be worn by the initiate, and every thorn in this complete circlet represents the various difficulties and temptations which beset the pathway of the upward climbing soul in its long journey back to God—to its ultimate goal, perfection. Right on from Adam to Jesus has every thorn and thistle been plucked out of the earth (flesh) and is held firmly in the hand of the conqueror till at last they are all bound in one circlet and worn as a crown of triumph, which is but the symbol of another, the crown of glory and dominion, of wisdom and achievement. This latter crown is alone given to "him that overcometh." When we are entitled to wear it then we are masters instead of servants. The Spirit has triumphed over Matter; the Son of God rules the Son of Man.

"Now comes the last act in the tragedy. We must take up our cross consciously and willingly, proving by our carrying of it that we recognise it to be the crossing out of the old nature—the death of the old Adam—that we may arise and put on the glory of the new, renewed in righteousness and true holiness. But we must not only carry it, we must also hang upon it; for this alone proves to all the world that the Son

of Man is lifted up. The Jesus must die that the Christ may live for ever. It is expedient that one man die. We thus crucify out the old man, Adam, with his ignorance, lusts and affections, his appetites of the flesh, his misconceptions as to his true god-being; that we may resurrect the new Man—Christ—which is after the likeness of the Father, thus showing forth in ourselves God manifest in Man. So we too bear the marks of the five wounds, which are the overcoming of the five senses, the ruling out of these by nailing them to the cross on which our human nature dies that our divinity alone may live eternally.

“Having followed our Leader so far, we must go with Him to the end, till we know also that ‘it is finished,’ for right into the jaws of death, into the pit of hell He goes. So in like manner must we be buried to the things of sense and worldly desires—be dead to the world and the things of it, ere we can arise to walk in newness of life. Death to the fleshly impulses and everlasting life for the awakened soul, here and now: not a bodily annihilation or even passing out from off this visible plane of existence, but a conscious spiritual resurrection, a transmutation from the natural man ruled by mortal sense, to immortal man ruling all; from human to divine; from Son of Man to Son of God is the true glory of our Easter morning.

“Then, beloved, to us ‘the Lord is risen indeed,’ and we are glad with a great joy. It is said that at His passing on, as the result of His crucifixion, there was a darkness over all the land. Yes, to the people who sat in darkness, and under the shadow of the fear of death, there came a great revelation, for He proved to them the nothingness of that which they feared, till they could exclaim, ‘O! Death, where is thy sting? O! Grave, where is thy victory?’ He had triumphed over it, and He brought our heaven down to us by that act, proving that His words were true when He said, ‘the Kingdom of God has come nigh unto you.’ Yes, the kingdom of life overcame the kingdom of death for ever, since if death had no power over Him, it need

have no terrors for us if we will but follow Him in every detail of His overcoming. We each and all sit in darkness till the Son of Man on Calvary's hill is crucified to us ; till it is finished and we are conscious of life within. We have ever been conscious of that life within though we have long walked in fear of death. But, once we have seen the risen Christ within our own souls, we, like Thomas, cry aloud, ' My Lord and my God ! ' for then we know that God and Man—God and ourself—is One ; we are from this hour no longer separated, the At-one-ment has taken place and there is a reconciliation. Death has no more power over the resurrected soul, now risen to its conscious divinity, for then we realize the glorious truth that we ' are awake in His likeness, therefore satisfied.'

" We are to-day, in these latter days, realizing this glorious revelation. It is the dawning of the true Easter morning for the world, of which that first Easter was the symbol and promise. The night of darkness is past and the Sun of Righteousness has already arisen with healing in His wings. The first beams of His glory shine above the eastern horizon, and ye who can read the signs of the times may joyfully exclaim, ' Lo ! Christ is risen.' Yea, He is already risen in the hearts of men and women who love His name and wait for His appearing according to His promise. He is already visible to the faithful few. Then rejoice, ye faithful ones, ye patient watchers through the long, long night of gloom, for the Lord has indeed risen and has appeared unto Simon Peter, he who among the disciples of Jesus represents the understanding and is the rock on which all knowledge must be founded. Then soon, very soon, beloved, every eye shall see Him and recognize Him as He is, and be glad when they know it is indeed the Lord, and our very God the Father of all, who has been with us all the long journey through. Amen."

This was the first public appearance of Edna Esbourne (better known as " Sister Beulah ") and while the audience filed out of the hall to the strains of the

organ playing the inspiring anthem, “ Sound the Loud Timbrel,” many remarks were dropped that gave reason to believe that it was a very decided success. However, it was but the beginning of a course of lectures which Edna was persuaded to give during the winter months in the Queen’s Hall, and so in this manner her soul’s deepest desire was realised, for in this ministration to humanity she tasted Love’s brimming cup, and, drinking, LIVED !

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“ WHEN THE MISTS HAVE ROLLED AWAY.”

“ Until the day break, and the shadows flee away.”

—SONG OF SOLOMON, II, 17.

Edna had been successful in securing a prettily situated house at Ermington on the hill overlooking Parramatta River and the surrounding orchards and orange groves that graced its banks. She named the house “ The Retreat,” and they removed here from Darlinghurst early in September, taking Reggie with them. Edna was sorry to have to take him from St. John’s School, but he went to one at Strathfield, being driven to the station by Sallust (whom Mr. Esbourne had sent to them when Edna moved out of town), when he took Frank in each morning, returning in the afternoon ; or perhaps Edna, or even Gracie, would drive to the station to meet him ; and often, as the distance was but a mile, the sturdy little fellow could easily walk it.

Edna had given the boy every care and his little mind was daily expanding under her wise training, while she did not neglect his physical development as well, insisting on his taking regular gymnastic exercises and teaching him to practice deep breathing. Thus he was developing on all planes of his being and unfolding his inherent capabilities, and without any forcing was growing into a fine healthy boy, who gave promise of being a strong, self-reliant man. She had

taken a double pride in this work, not only for her own sake and that of the child, but because she desired that when Roger Northbrook returned he should see the great change for the better that had taken place in Reggie. She felt that Roger also had a deep interest in Reggie's progress, and that he knew when he entrusted the little lad to her—or rather yielded up his claim to him, as he did when she told him she had decided to adopt Mysia's boy—that he could not have gone into better hands, nor those who would do him greater justice. Thus it was Edna felt that when Roger came back he would know that she had been faithful to her trust; indeed, that she had been all that a true mother could be to the child, had Reggie indeed been her own son, and Roger his father.

The boy was in his element now that they had removed from town into the country. Here he watched the birds building their nests in the trees of the orchard, and discovered the tiny nests of the blue-wren or silver-eye, swinging in the branch of a lemon tree; or the sparrow under the eaves of the verandah; and his delight was unbounded when he discovered a pair of swallows carrying the little bits of clay and building their funny little mud nest in a corner of the bathroom. After that he would watch the door carefully in case it should chance to get closed and so shut out the busy little things; or he would rise early in the morning and run out in his pyjamas to see if they had yet finished building, and the mother bird sitting on her fine new nest. The boy had been taught by Edna never to hurt the birds, as they were all expressions of the one Universal Life and were thus in God's care as we were also. There, in this respect, he was an exception to the other boys in the district, who had been taught that the birds are pests, and eat the fruit, and should be shot or destroyed; but because his "Mama Edna" told him that they must not be hurt, nor their eggs taken from their pretty nests, nothing would have induced Reggie to disturb one of them, or injure them in any way.

Reggie Vernon had never lived in the country before, so that everything was new and strange to him, and with childish delight he watched the fruits forming on the trees after the blossoms fell, and listened with real interest when Edna explained the laws of nature to his expanding and inquiring mind. Truly, the little fellow grew more, and revealed his keen intelligence to a fuller degree, during those months at "The Retreat" than he had done throughout the years he spent in town. He seemed to be in his natural element, and there was a wild, joyous freedom in his movements, that rejoiced Edna's heart and made her glad that she had brought the child away from the depressing atmosphere of the city. Gracie also began to improve very quickly, and soon regained her lost bloom.

Edna herself seemed new-born now that she could get out under the stars once again and commune with the great Over-Soul as she was wont to do in the garden at "Cumbooqueepa." She found a favorite spot under the shade of the persimmon trees at the foot of the orchard, near an old well (which had been sunk in the early days of the colony by convict labor, and was historic in itself), and here when the household were wrapped in slumber, this woman would kneel in prayer and seek communion with her Divine Self, and learn from the Source of all Wisdom and Truth the lessons of life and love which she would expound to her little company of "Truth Seekers" on the Sunday evening when she went into the city, fresh from the peace and silence of her village home. Thus she would carry her draughts of living waters to the tired, weary and thirsty travellers on the highways of life, and by her words of loving sympathy, peace and purity help them onwards and upwards along the road she was herself climbing, till they should all attain to the heights above, where they would hear the cry, wafted to their straining ears from the voices of those who had already overcome, and reached the Home of the Soul: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of

the world, for these, these are they that are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

The Sunday following their removal to "The Retreat," Edna went into the city to give her regular Sunday evening address at the hall, where she was now the recognised speaker for the students of the Science of Life, or, as they were better known among outsiders, "The Truth-Seekers." She had chosen as her subjects for the first series of her lectures the chief events in the life of Jesus, and under the title of "New Testament Studies," had taken them one after another as recorded in the Gospels and expounded them by the Illumination of the Spirit of All Truth.

Edna's subject on this particular evening was "The Cross of Christ—Sacrifice," and there being a good attendance she felt strengthened and helped by the presence of many new faces among her audience and felt that each one was fresh ground in which to sow the good seed of the Kingdom; therefore she excelled herself in her eloquence and earnestness, her subject being one that gave rein to her descriptive powers, and enabled her to open up new ground on the meaning of sacrifice as revealed in the Old and New Testaments. She carried her hearers through the whole story of Abraham's sacrifice of His only son Isaac upon the Mount, showing that his offering up to the Lord of that which he loved best—that in which all the promises of God to him were centred—was typical of our own daily sacrifice of ourselves or our best beloved, as the demand was made, that we might serve the Lord in singleness of heart and not let anything or any person stand between us and our God. That we too must climb the Mount of Sacrifice with our load bound upon our shoulders, as Abraham had bound the sticks upon the back of Isaac his son, his only son, and willingly offered this his best beloved to the Lord, who gave him unto him in his old age, and in whom all nations of the earth were to be blessed.

The benediction had been pronounced and Edna

stood for a moment motionless on the platform ere she moved away as usual while the congregation filed out. It was only for a few seconds that she thus stood with her eyes fixed on a point at the bottom of the hall, but her face paled and a bright light leaped into her eyes and spread itself over her whole countenance, so that for a moment she was transformed with the pulsations of an inner joy, and several of the people stood to look at her, expectantly waiting in the belief that she was going to say a few more words ; but their action recalled Sister Beulah to herself, and, bowing "good-night" to all, she moved behind the screen, with a smile upon her lips and a prayer of thanksgiving in her heart because of what she had seen. It was only a face, a well-known face, with a glance from a pair of dark eyes that she saw. But that face was illuminated with a new light, a light that had never been there before, for it was the unmistakeable beams that alone can shine from an awakened soul. It was what the woman had watched, waited and prayed for daily, and here to-night she knew her prayer was answered, and she was glad with a great and holy joy.

When the hall was empty and only Miss Glenroy and Gracie were with her, the latter said in an excited whisper, "Oh ! Edna, darling, your address was grand to-night, and I was so glad, too, because did you know that Mr. Northbrook was among the audience at the back of the hall ?"

"Yes, dear, I know now, but I did not see him till I had finished speaking," replied Edna quickly.

"Oh ! then that was what you were looking at when you closed : I did not know you had not seen him earlier. He spoke to me after the meeting and is waiting outside for us now," Gracie remarked, as she busied herself gathering up Edna's books, chatting the while to Miss Glenroy about the various items of interest connected with the meeting. Edna, however, was very quiet. It was not till she was outside the hall and found herself under the verandah in Pitt Street that she became conscious of what she was glad and

rejoiced over this evening more than any other, or that she knew she was in expectancy of seeing anyone in particular ; indeed, she wished that she might just go quietly home to-night alone to think over what had been revealed to her. It seemed as if her silent wish had brought its fulfilment, for at this moment Gracie came up, with Cyril by her side, to say that Mr. Northbrook had left a message to say he would not wait to see Edna to-night, but he thought she would understand, and that he would come out to " The Retreat " early to-morrow morning.

Yes, Edna understood perfectly, and with a holy calm in her breast and peace filling both heart and soul, she joined the rest of the party and hastened on to the Redfern Station, where they caught their train to Ryde, and thence by the coach to Ermington, arriving at " The Retreat " about half-past ten, after a blessed evening of seed-sowing.

Edna Esbourne awakened before 6 o'clock the following morning and, looking out of her window, saw that the whole country round their home was veiled in a thick mist, and as she had not had the opportunity of seeing the effects of rising morning mists lately, she quickly dressed and stepped out into the garden to revel in the beauties of early spring seen in a veil of white vapor. A heavy dew had fallen during the night, indeed one of the heaviest that winter, everything was enveloped in a fleecy veil and bathed in a softly dripping moisture. Edna walked through the chill morning air, fresh with a frosty keenness, that smote upon her nostrils with a tingling sensation, as she drew in deep breaths of its invigorating life. She wandered down to the foot of the garden, where a seat beneath a tree commanded a fine view of the country around. The effect was very remarkable, and to her artistic eye most picturesque, indeed she became quite absorbed in watching the cloud effects as they changed rapidly before her vision. Farms, orchards, gardens ; all were shrouded in a sea of rolling mist stretching far away to the south. In the foreground lay the river,

but only resembling an extensive white lake from whose bosom the thin vapory clouds were gradually rising into the ether above. Tree tops and chimneys only, peeped out here and there above the foamy billows of this slowly moving sea. The edge of the sun's rim was just visible on the eastern horizon, and resembled a large golden moon. Gradually he got larger and larger, till in a few minutes he was wholly risen and there hung suspended over the ocean of white mist like a huge golden ball. Not a cloud above to herald his coming. A sky of grey blue in the east with here and there only fine lines of flecked white vapor overhead, all the clouds lay low upon the earth and the vault above was clear. As the sun arose all nature also awoke. The birds began to twit and chirrup; the Kookaburras in a grove beyond laughed hilariously to greet the morning. The farmyards around seemed unusually active in the noises of their feathered tribes. The higher slopes of the hill began to rise gradually out of the fleecy foam which had enveloped them; the trees in the orchards below on the flats by the river took form and slowly defined themselves, but at first appeared more like shadowy ghosts of themselves, and the taller gum trees whose heads had only just been visible above that vapory sea now rose into view and revealed the full height of their graceful trunks, showing how deeply they had been buried therein. The sun was now well risen and as Edna gazed upon the rapidly evolving scene she noticed that all the higher land around was bathed in a pale sunshine, and the thin smoke of the cottage chimneys could be defined through the haze, revealing the spots where those nestling homes stood. The nearer sweep of the river was now visible, but its usually clear blue waters were of a dull sluggish grey, and the low-lying land on the opposite point but dimly defined. Down on the flats and in the hollows and valleys between the hills and gentle slopes around, this opal sea was gathering more densely as it rolled in slowly moving billows, and condensed into an almost impenetrable density

near the railway bridge, which crossed the river lower down, but which was now quite obliterated, for here the fog had accumulated in dense masses, quite blotting out familiar objects till to the eye unaccustomed to their presence they were as though they were not.

The whistle of an approaching train suddenly broke through the silent air, but its usual shrillness seemed drowned, and when it crossed the iron bridge, getting nearer and nearer to where Edna should have been able to see it as it passed in the distance, it was quite invisible. Plunging into that white vapoury sea, it was buried beneath the fleecy billows, and its noise deadened till reduced to a dull rumbling like the sound of far away thunder. Only its track was discernible by watching the trail of darker smoke that rose above the fog beneath. Edna watched the onward and nearer approach of that speeding train with a strange curiosity, and followed its trail of smoke after it crossed the bridge till she heard it stop at Meadow Bank station, then move on again, and later pause at Ryde, till after leaving there it was lost in the fog that enveloped the cutting through the Highlands Estate, on to Eastwood, after which she returned to her contemplation of the moving panorama around her. As the beams of the risen sun now became stronger, that opalescent sea began to slowly move off the face of the scene—folding itself up like a scroll or gathering its trailing white skirts, it silently stole away, till it was seen in one place only, on the now sunlight-bathed horizon, and that was below the bridge, where it seemed to pause and there muster its silent forces, forming them into shadowy battalions, squads and squares, preparatory to setting off on a long march, leaving no trace within a few hours, perchance, of its ghostly visitation.

Leaving no trace, did we say? But surely there were many and very beautiful traces of its presence in the garden now, for as Edna lifted her eyes from watching those weird transformations that had been going on around her she began to notice things in the nearer foreground; objects close at hand in the garden.

It was September and the season late winter, or perhaps early spring ; so early, though, that you would not have yet known that spring was so near had you not been as observant as was Edna Esbourne, and that from an intense love of Nature in all her many moods and various manifestations of life. The fruit-trees were now in their first throes of labor, ready to bring forth their wealth of blossoms and young leaves. Every branch she looked upon that morning was bursting with little brown buds, the plum tree boughs were as rough as though covered with blunt thorns ; while the pink peach blossoms were just peeping out of their little bronze-green nests ready to burst into full bloom when Mother Nature gave the signal for them all to appear in full dress array. Even now there were a few late peach trees (which always blossom first) whose branches showed here and there some advance heralds of springtide glory. Wandering on among the dew-spangled grass, at the risk of wet feet, Edna examined everything with eager admiring gaze and observant eyes, that missed nothing in Nature's lovely domains, and saw there what the presence of that ghostly visitant during the night meant to the trees, flowers and grasse. Every little leaf and petal was covered with a thin frosty moisture that outlined it perfectly ; every tiny blossom was dew-bespangled ; and every tree appeared fresh and dripping from its early morning bath ; while the grass was wet with the heavy shower of moisture that lay upon every blade and sparkled like diamonds beneath the rays of the morning sun. Yes, mused Edna, this has indeed been "showers of blessings" to everything it has touched. The winter had been an exceptionally dry one and rain was then badly needed in the district, but surely there was a lesson to be learned from this morning scene, and Edna paused in her walk and seated herself beneath a clump of bamboos, where a seat had been built for her by Sallust, and she had christened it her "Peace Nook," for here she was accustomed to sit during the evenings

when warm and fine, while she gave her mental treatments or sent gifts of healing thought to those in the Father's great family whom she knew required health, strength or loving sympathy.

"Yes, I know my lesson this morning has been given like the dew to the flowers—silently," she thought, as she sat down and leaned her head back with closed eyes to think it out quietly, before she should return to the house. Was it not like all the good gifts of God, each given so freely and without stint, without pomp or ostentation—given in the night while all slept, stealing gently upon and over the soul of the earth (the planet as well as man's body) and showering liberally the richest blessings of love, life, peace and light upon all—good and evil, just and unjust being alike partakers, no favoritism since all and every one could take just what they most desired and take from that limitless Source of Supply sufficient for all their needs of body, soul and spirit. Could appropriate it just as each little flower, shrub, grass or tree was then doing, drinking in their fill of that lavishly scattered morning dew. And all was from the hand of a bountiful Father, who thus provided abundantly for his children on every plane, in every kingdom—mineral, vegetable, animal, human—all were given according to their needs, they had but to accept his loving bounty and drink that water of life, eat of the bread of His substance, and *live*.

"Yes," thought the woman as she lifted her eyes to the beauties of the scene around her, "I know where that bread of substance and wine of life is to be found now, and there I can go when hungry or thirsty for spiritual food, just as the flowers drink in the dew. It is in the silence of my inner kingdom, where the Spirit ministers unto the hungry soul, unseen by mortal eye; these hidden waters are given unto us as the dews to the thirsty earth, which when they have bestowed their blessing silently steal away, never even waiting to be thanked; only glad to see each tiny floweret and humble plant refreshed and revived by its generous

outpouring. Yes, He giveth it to His beloved *while they sleep*. Truly it is so, since while we are wrapped in the sleep of mortal sense we are being built up and strengthened by the good gifts of the Spirit and we know it not, nor are we aware of its coming or going till we feel within ourselves the benefits we have derived from those silent visitations in the night of the soul. Yes, this is indeed my morning lesson, I too must drink as do the flowers from the fountain of His love and let my soul expand in praise and thanksgiving for all His goodness and mercy unto us, till, like them, I shall burst into full bloom and suddenly realize that I am awake in His likeness!"

"Edna! I have come."

A voice she knew well and for whose sound she had been unconsciously waiting, uttered these words; and turning her head she beheld Roger Northbrook standing bareheaded near her. He had approached noiselessly across the dewy grass and as she was wrapped in contemplation her ears had not heard his footfalls or the rustle among the leaves. With a welcoming smile on her beautiful face, Edna greeted him with outstretched hands, saying:

"Roger, you are welcome in the name of the Lord, for I know that you have come in the power of His Spirit."

"How did you discover that, *Sister Beulah*?" he asked, while he took her outstretched hands in both his own and looked smilingly down into the clear fearless eyes that were lifted to his own, and laying a very marked emphasis upon the word "*Sister*," as he gave her the new name by which she was now known.

"The Spirit revealed it to me last night at the close of my address, and then when I scanned the faces in the hall I beheld yours there, and the moment I looked upon it I knew—I understood that ——"

"You understood that all was well with my soul. That I had learned my lesson at last, and now know where my soul's true mate alone dwells. That I come again to the gates of my long deserted Eden and, like

a weary foot-sore Adam, I cry unto the Eve that already waits there for my return, 'What shall I do to be saved? Where is my rest?'. "

"Come unto me," said the voice of the woman by his side, gently, sweetly, tenderly, "and I will give thee rest and peace from the turmoil and the strife, Roger, now the mists have rolled away and you know me as I have so long known you."

"I come, my queen, I come to you in love and worship. I the man adore you the woman, just as my soul knelt within me at the shrine of your soul that night in the garden three years ago. Edna, my wife, my love, I offer you the holiest, purest, truest devotion of man's best self. I see you as you are, I recognise you now for what you are indeed—my higher, better self's true mate—mine and not another's. Edna *this* is love, perfect love, I bring you this time; will you accept this pure offering from the altar of my heart? It is the incense of my soul."

"My king, my heart's only husband, it has always been mine, never another's. It could not be; you were sleeping and did not know me then. You saw but through a glass darkly, now we see face to face and know as we are known. Yes, Roger, and never more shall we walk alone. We are one throughout all eternity, for, see! the mists have indeed rolled away from your vision as they have done from the landscape, and as I watched them melt into nothingness before the sun's beams while this new morning dawned, behold! another and brighter day has risen upon me; for you, my soul's king, have emerged from the mists and now stand before me resurrected, and clothed in the garments of your new-found divinity, your soul's true manhood—and are thus glorified. Now, Roger, we are in very reality united souls, one for evermore, and the bonds that bind us no man can put asunder, for they are the bonds of the Love of Christ."

"To such bonds I willingly submit my whole future life, for now, oh! Edna, thou soul of my soul, since I have found and know thee at last, with God be the

rest," he answered fervently, and then with reverent touch the man gathered this woman close to his heart and there she rested "satisfied."

Thus after many days, or what to the earth-child is long years, of weary waiting and watching, for the dawning of the morning of final realization, this woman found, and was eventually recognised by, her one and only true mate: her soul's divine partner throughout eternity.

Now it was that the revelations which her mother had given her regarding her dream flashed upon Edna's mind, and she remembered that her Spirit-mother had said that she was first to find her soul's other half ere she could claim her new name, Maya, which would entitle her to be called a daughter of God; and that this would then mean the opening up of the way for the completion of her mission and the delivery of her message to the world. That then she should have the right to claim her crown of victory in the Kingdom of Life Eternal from the hand of her Divine Father, to whom she must return. This was now possible, she knew, for she was a whole (or holy) soul, a complete being, and by this perfect soul and heart union that had now become a reality—the ideal realized—she was fitted to return to her Source as they came forth originally—two in one, a duality in unity, now one in two, for over all was the presiding and eternal Third, which formed the mystic Trinity.

Lifting her face from Roger's breast, where it had nestled in fulness of perfect peace and holy love, in which their souls had once again mingled, and their hearts had communed with each other silently, Edna said, "Come and sit here in my "Peace Nook," Roger, and tell me about yourself and your wanderings; you have been absent a very long time—longer than you intended when you first wrote."

"Yes, my beloved, I know that I have extended my stay far beyond the limits I first proposed when I started out on my travels. But that I am here to-day as I am, and here by your side as your accepted husband

in heart and soul, is the excuse that kept me so long absent. Edna, my soul's dear wife, it has been your work, yours alone, your prayers, your faith, your belief in me that has made me what I now know I am for ever, a regenerated man," he exclaimed, as he drew her closer to him, and with eager gaze looked deep into her beautiful eyes that were now suffused with the soft brown flecks indicating that the woman's tenderest, most sympathetic and softest mood was ruling her whole being. The Woman in Edna predominated now: it was not the philosopher and teacher that sat by his side, with those eyes looking lovingly into his, but just the sweetest, fairest, purest, yet most angelic thing in all the wide world to a man—a tender-souled *woman*.

"Nay, dearest Roger, it has been the Divine Lord of your own being that has unfolded your divinity to your inner view," responded Edna.

"Admitted, dear one," he assented, gently stroking her soft hair as her head rested against his shoulder. "Yet that Lord uses instruments to do His blessed work, and you have been that beautiful, yet very sharp-edged tool that has cut and shaped me during these last three years. I have had a long and severe battle with myself, dear; I have had to overcome my old nature again on every plane of my being. I thought I had mastered it long ago, but it was only sleeping, not killed out—or perhaps you would say, transmuted. For a very long time I fought against my better self. I wanted you, Edna, I have always wanted you since I first knew you, I know now; but I never felt that I desired to make any alteration in my life or mode of thinking, till I left you that last time when you told me I might come to you again when I wanted you more than anything else in all the universe. I thought I did then, Edna; but I found later that I desired to have my own way also, that I wanted to rule you and have you for my own like any other man has his wife: not as the partner of my soul, so much as of my life and pleasures. I also found I longed for

greater fame in the literary world, and then I achieved that also, and it was as Dead Sea fruit to me after I had tasted it, for I still found myself longing for something that it did not satisfy. I knew I wanted you, but I felt that I could not come to you as you desired I should come, and so I put off my return again. Later on I felt that I would be happier if I tried to forget you altogether, and would seek the society of other women—ordinary women, whom a man meets every day, and who are very charming in themselves, and if a man has no higher aspirations than the delights of the hour, will satisfy him completely. This I did, and devoted myself to the sex for some months, just to test myself, and strive to obliterate the image you had left so deeply imprinted upon my soul—yes, I say *my soul*, advisedly, Edna, for I do not think I had any great passion for you in my heart then (if I may speak without fear of hurting you, and I feel that the understanding between us now is so perfect that I could never do that). She smiled her reassurance and he continued :

"I really think that the only image my heart retained was that of Mysia. I am honest with you, beloved, because I know you will understand me ; therefore, when I had wearied of many women whom I met I wondered if there was ever to be rest for my weary heart ? if I was always to be disappointed and unsatisfied with life, yet having all that should tend to make life enjoyable ? I could not meet one who could fill Mysia's place in my heart, and yet I could not obliterate your image from my soul. Edna, I assure you that such experiences as I passed through up till six months ago make all the hell a man needs. There is no place that could be equal—even in a Dantean imagination—to the torments of the mind when it is being purged and purified by the fires of the Spirit as I know mine was. I felt like one lost in the universe, without a place to rest the sole of my foot, without joy or peace anywhere. All was darkness, hopelessness and despair. I groped aimlessly

in search for even a glimmer of light in the darkness, but found none. But I have since learned that I did not seek in the only true way, which would have revealed the Truth and the Life to me long before. I sought through the fields of Intellect, and I ignored Intuition. I would not listen to her still small voice that often whispered to me in the silence when I sat thinking of you, and indeed seemed to be the echo of your own words as they fell on my ears just now, saying, 'Come unto me and I will give you rest.' "

"But that was the voice of your Divine Self—God's Christ—speaking to your soul, Roger—not my voice, dear," interposed Edna gently.

"I know that now, dearest, but just at that time I did not. I wanted then to come to you, O! more than words of mine can tell, but Edna I could not. I simply could not make up my mind to come, and even had I forced myself to do so, I felt I could not meet you again, for I had nothing to say; nothing to ask for that I wanted very much, nothing worth offering you, to give. I was deep, deep in the waters of discontent and unrest; indeed, I was down in the valley of the shadows, so to speak, and the gloom and melancholy that settled upon my soul for one week I shall never forget. It was awful, I really did not care what became of me, and even death would have been preferable to such torture; and for what, I could not tell. It simply *was*, that was all I knew, all I was conscious of.

"Then one night I rose from my bed, where I had been tossing restlessly for some hours, and walked out into the streets, and away into one of the beautiful fern valleys that abound in the hills around Christchurch; and there, under the stars, I sat down to think this strange fit of misery out, and fight it to the death. It was nearly morning before I was conscious of the passing of time, and then it was because the stars began to pale and a deeper darkness shrouded the landscape over which I gazed. This made me look up and I then remembered that 'the darkest hour is

just before the dawn,' and it came to me like a flash that probably this was indeed my darkest hour of soul-travail, and perhaps ere the sun was risen the clouds that had so long enveloped my soul would lift from my mental horizon and the Light of Truth dawn upon me also. Strange at that moment just as the idea crossed my mind I felt as if you were by my side, and I even looked around to make sure that no one was there, but I was quite alone; still, I knew that you were thinking of me and praying for me, too?" And he paused to again look deeply into those dear eyes that now were indeed his beacon lights, and would remain so throughout eternity.

"I think," he continued, "that the faith I seemed to have in the idea that my mists would roll away when the sun rose over the sea yonder, helped to dispel them, for I sat patiently waiting and watching for his coming, longing for the first streaks of morning to dawn in the east, and while I waited I thought only of you, Edna. I put all other ideas out of my mind and just tried to recall many of the beautiful thoughts which you had so often voiced during our many conversations, before the tragedy; and the memories of much that had lingered in my mind, were a source of comfort and consolation; they filled my soul with a more restful feeling than I had experienced for many months.

"Then I thought of what you had often spoken about, and stated had come to you after that revelation in the garden when you sought and found your God, and, before I was aware I discovered that I too had followed your example and was on my knees, praying with all my heart and soul that I might also find the God that you knew and so taste the 'peace that passeth all understanding.' Yes, I am not ashamed now to say so, my darling, my saviour, my wife; for I consider that it was your invisible guiding hand that led me through the mists then. But I poured out my whole soul in that half-hour or more of the most intense prayer, or desire, that it was ever a man's lot to experience. Indeed, if we desired everything good in

life as keenly as I desired the peace I sought then, I fancy it would not be long before the Kingdom of God would come upon earth. It was like rending the heavens to cause Him to come down and reveal Himself to my soul.

"And come He did, for, according to my expectations and my faith, the moment the sun burst over the sea, the Light of God shone in all its glory into my long darkened soul, flooding it with such an effulgence that I was like Paul, dazzled by the brightness of that wonderful revelation and indescribable brilliance. I was as a being transformed. I felt as though I—the old despondent, hopeless, miserable I—the man—had died to the world and had awakened in another life—a very god.

"Edna, Edna," he said more intensely, while he held both her hands clasped closely in his own: "Oh: Edna, now I understand what it would have been to you to unite your life with mine when I desired it, and before this great light had come to me. I know now, dear, that it would have been like linking midnight with noonday. Only those souls who have seen the glory of the Father as we have seen it can truly know what life means. Only such truly live; all else is merely existence, darkness, death. I know now that Love is Life Eternal, and this I know is the gift of God which Jesus promised to those who would believe on His name and that means have faith to grasp it, and, grasping it once, to hold it for ever, since no powers in heaven or earth or hell can ever take such from the soul of man that has awakened to its own divinity, and therefore is alive for evermore.

"Now I can say with Paul, 'O! Death, where is thy sting? O! Grave, where is thy victory?' I, the Divine Lord of my being, now recognised as God's Christ, have triumphed over death and hell, and they no more have the victory they have had so long. Man's soul once having arisen, as I know mine has done, is ascended indeed unto the Father, and lives eternally in the Heaven of Dominion and Power, a very Son of God."

Roger Northbrook paused in this for him most

unusual speech, and for a moment so affected with deep and overwhelming joy was Edna that she could not reply to what her soul was longing to say.

This was her crown of victory ; this was her place in the Kingdom of Life Eternal ; this was her soul's other self, and while looking in his eyes, now flashing with the glorious light of an awakened soul, she beheld there the image of the Father—the Divine Father—to whom she was to return in fulness of time ; then she felt that deep within herself lay the pulsations of the heart of that Divine-Mother from whom she came forth, and that she was to him that woman regenerate ; and so intermingled as to be also sister and mother as well as to fill the holy estate of wife ; soul of his very soul objectified and in such perfection now as to live thus for ever and for ever while eternities should roll ; for in the regenerated man and woman is the perfect God the Father-Mother of all, incarnate.

At length Edna spoke, but she did not then voice these great ideas that had just opened their mysteries to her spiritual vision, but she said, “ Roger, now I can claim my new name, and you, too, must have yours, for the children of the resurrection all have new names written upon their foreheads, and we are children of the resurrection, for we are alive for ever, we are awake in the Kingdom of Christ, seeing he has come to us as he came to Jesus of Nazareth. Your second name is Joshua, and it is equivalent to Jesus, therefore means “ a leader and commander of the people.” This shall be your new name, and from henceforth you shall be called by it, as you will indeed be that in the new kingdom of Light and Truth which is now at our doors ; and where you shall be used to do the will of the Father among His many children of earth, and so minister also to your brethren as it is my mission and delight to also minister to my many sad and suffering sisters. This is the beginning of a great and wonderful time and these latter days are pregnant with mysteries that but few shall be able to unravel. I will tell you more about the New Kingdom,

of which we are the heralds, when we have more time together ; also, who are the children of the resurrection, and where they shall be gathered."

"You spoke of a new name for yourself, dear," observed Roger. "What is yours? I am quite satisfied to yield up the old one myself and adopt the new, especially when it is spoken by the lips of my best beloved. *Joshua*—yes, it is a stronger name and one more worthy of the new man who now carries it with rejoicing and would bear out to the full its meaning and interpretation in the service of the Highest."

"My new name? Oh! of course, you may not know that the last of my three is Maya? I generally write it just 'M.' That is to be my new name, and indeed it was given me in the beginning before I arrived here on this planet at all, according to the vision my dear mother had and which she has since related to me," explained Edna, and then she recounted to Roger briefly the outlines of what she had heard from her mother regarding her three names, and her claim to be a daughter of God.

"Ah! Roger, you have filled my cup of gladness so full that I almost tremble to lift it to my lips," sighed Edna, with a soft dreamy light in her eyes. "But—but—," she paused, and he repeated:

"But what, beloved?"

"You have not expressed an opinion about what you thought of my action in stepping out of a woman's province and standing as I did last night upon the public platform," she half-whispered.

"I have changed my attitude towards much that I once objected to, Edna, and I consider a woman can teach as clear a moral or spiritual lesson from platform or even pulpit as a man, and perhaps even better if she live the life herself. Nay," he added, "instead of being disappointed to discover you there, I was proud of your development and must commend you for your very able treatment of your subject, and the excellent delivery you gave to it. I said from the first that I saw a great future for you, and I now confirm my

statement, while instead of claiming the privilege of helping you as your friend, I glory in it as my right and stand by your side as your true husband to help and succour you in the work that lies before us both.

"This I believe is your ideal crystallized: 'That you shall be a true, pure, noble woman; living for your God, your husband, and the race; the redeemer and saviour of your sex; the dreamer of and worker for a regenerated and purified Australia, the last of the lands, yet the first.'"

* * * * *

"Edna! Edna! Come to breakfast," called Gracie's voice from the verandah. Then, before Edna could answer, a fine sturdy laddie came running down the garden path, and when he saw and recognised Roger his delight was unbounded. Then as together they walked back to the house, Reggie quite monopolized Roger and wanted to take him off at once to see the swallows' nest, and to show him a hundred things that were his own especial delight; but Edna had to check his ardour by telling him that he had plenty of time to show all these things to "Uncle Roger," who was home to-stay, and he could have him as long as he liked.

"Indeed, there is a strong probability that you will have me altogether now," laughed Roger, mischievously, glancing at Edna.

"Why, are you never going away any more?" asked Reggie.

"Not if your 'Mama Edna' wishes me to stay and you are still determined to be her 'own little boy,'" answered Roger.

"Of course I am, I couldn't be anyone else's," affirmed the little fellow stoutly.

"Then I fancy I shall have to change my name and instead of being 'Uncle Roger' to you I shall have to be 'Papa Roger' to match with 'Mama Edna.' What do you say to that, Reggie?"

At this Gracie, who had come forward and joined them, looked hard into Roger's face and then into Edna's, just one swift scrutinizing glance : only one at each of them, but she was satisfied, for she flung her arms around her sister's neck impulsively, exclaiming, " Oh ! my darling ! my darling, I am so glad, so very glad. God bless you and give you the best of His gifts."

" He will—He has already, Gracie, for He has given me the desires of my heart and soul, and this is the promise of greater and holier ones to come," answered Edna in deeply reverent tones.

" What have I done, Gracie, that I should be left behind the door when your favors are being distributed ? You must know now that Edna and I are but one soul in two bodies, that you cannot give her anything I may not share," interposed Roger, teasingly

Gracie blushed to the tips of her pretty ears and then shyly offered her soft rounded cheek to her prospective brother-in-law, but this did not satisfy Roger, for he took her sweet face between the palms of his hands and deliberately kissed the rosy smiling mouth, at which Reggie, who had watched the performance, cried out :

" Ha ! Now I'll tell Cyril."

" Cyril will never object to his big brother kissing *our* Gracie, for she was ours before she was his," laughed Roger as they now entered the house.

Then Edna, noticing that Gracie was confused, and to put her at her ease again, said banteringly, as she observed that her sister had put on her little gold-satin lined cape inside out :

" Why, Gracie ! I declare everything seems topsy-turvy this morning ; even you have got your wrap on inside out."

Gracie put up her hand to discover her mistake,

as she stepped on to the verandah and took it off, saying lightly :

"Oh! Edna, that is of no consequence, because, you know—

'The inner side of every cloud
Is bright and shining.
I therefore turn *my* clouds about,
And always wear them inside out,
To show their lining.' "

CHAPTER XXXV.

HERALDS OF THE NEW KINGDOM.

"THE COMING ORDER:—After the Mammon-Worshippers have had their day, then will come in its fulness the worship of God. No single individual can serve both. The eye and the heart must be single—the mind absorbed in doing the Master's will; in obeying the divine Law of Life that 'whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them.' We believe the night of materialism is drawing to a close, and that the dawn of the Coming Day will usher in a new order of things; when men will love the beautiful—that which uplifts, brightens and glorifies the human mind; when honor, integrity and unselfishness will replace the low cunning of greed. Then will come the worship of God in spirit and in truth—finding its most vital expression in loving service for Humanity." —"MIND."

"A new life is slowly taking shape in the minds of earnest thinkers in which Men, and not Things, will be the most valued elements in the body social." —NICHOLAS CHRISTIAN.

It is late in April and the soft, mellow tints of autumn are fast fading into winter. Once more we are back at "Cumbooquepa" Station, but now everything is new. The homestead is new, a more solid brick edifice, large and commodious, but not quite so picturesque in appearance, yet much more substantial and likely to stand the ravages of a couple of such fires as those recently experienced. The grass and trees are all renewed and now green and flourishing. The sheep are not those that were shepherded in the time of Malpus Brown, but are another generation altogether. Change and growth are everywhere evidenced in this extensive station home of our friends the Esbournes; yet the

people are those whom we have learned to know and love, and whose fortunes, sorrows and joys we have followed but of whom we are now about to take a long farewell. Yet the day will come when we shall meet Edna Esbourne again, when she returns to Australia and takes up her work in the service of humanity, and is known to the world as "*Maya*," a daughter of God.

Up till the present there have been no breaks in the ranks of the Esbourne family; they are now all gathered under the roof-tree once more, but this is for the last time. The morrow will see the first severing of those sweet home ties, the ties of love which had made them such a united family and their home a true type of what every home in Australia should be, and will yet be.

Gathered at the homestead on this last Sunday evening in April are many whom we have already met, and who have had a part in the life of the woman known as Edna Esbourne, or "*Sister Beulah*"; and will also have a share in the glories that are to be hers in the life that lies before her as the teacher of her sex in the New Kingdom which is to be set up on earth and where "*Maya*" shall not be the *only* "daughter of God."

With her, too, is her soul's husband, Roger Joshua Northbrook, who is indeed destined to be "a leader and commander of the people," a regenerated son of Man, now conscious of his divinity.

Grace Selah Esbourne, with her soul's affinity, Cyril Ambrose Clifford, are to be united as one, on the opening day of May, and then go forth together in truth and love to learn the lessons that shall fit them to teach and preach the Gospel of the coming kingdom to all who have ears to hear among the nations, and peoples, and tongues.

Miss Glenroy is also with the company gathered there, and is as ever, to those who know and love her, in very truth a "strong tower." Reggie Vernon also has a very prominent place among that family circle, and will yet take a more important position in the years to come, when his training is completed and his

initiation into the mysteries of the new dispensation have been imparted to him by those whom he will always look upon as his earthly father and mother.

Leonard Esbourne and Gwendoline Godfrey will make the second couple in the double wedding and will remain at the old homestead always, though there will soon be a still more heavy thinning of the ranks later on, if appearances speak truly. Already an engagement exists between Ella Esbourne and Victor Barcombe; while Frank Esbourne and Tessie Mostyn give promise that the union with the two families will be effected after many years, and the fathers of the two flocks will be able to feel that the link of old associations and the memories of early efforts and triumphs over many discouragements, which they have faced together, will be still more firmly welded in the generations that shall yet arise to call them blessed.

Then among the coming events that cast their shadows before is another in whom we are interested since the vivacious Amy Godfrey has been caught and tamed by the redoubtable Bertram Mostyn. That, too, after numerous others had failed to hold her firmly enough, or long enough, to win a promise of love and fidelity from the wilful sprite. However, she has been conquered by love, and has transmuted her excessive vitality into a more useful channel than playing pranks upon others or indulging in madcap ways. Amy has developed a very beautiful voice and promises to add another to the list of famous singers—"Stars of the South"—which Australia has contributed to the musical world. Roger Northbrook says that it is because she would persist in practising it during her visits to the homestead, when she "Coo-ceed" for the boys. Indeed, she was quite an expert at that art, and could send her long-sustained "Coo-oo-ee" resounding through the bush till it could be heard for miles, and its sound would echo and re-echo in the forest solitudes as though several others were replying with answering calls, till she could hear her

own voice as others heard it ; and she would laughingly remark that " it could strike her in the face when she threw it from her, like the rebound of a blackfellow's boomerang."

On this particular Sunday evening in April, the company were all gathered in the drawing-room of the new homestead, where the same exquisite taste, elegance and comfort ruled as was evidenced in the old home ; for the presiding genius had lost none of her old artistic love for the beautiful, and although Mrs. Esbourne had been obliged to sacrifice the idea of the lounge in the new building, she devoted all her energies and womanly skill to the adornment of the fine, lofty drawing-room ; and it now served both purposes. Here the young people were gathered round the grand piano, at which Edna was officiating as musician, while the others joined in singing many of their favorite hymns and anthems, Amy Godfrey leading the sopranos with wondrous skill, purity of tone and perfect technique. Cyril Clifford also took the tenor finely, and more especially was his voice noticeable when singing that grand old anthem, " How beautiful upon the Mountains," in which the whole company of voices joined with thrilling effect. So prophetic were the words to the ears of Edna that her emotions overcame her, and her eyes became humid with tears of joy and gladness, so that she could scarcely see to read the music. When the last bars died away she rose and resigning her seat to Ella, quietly left the little group. Stepping out upon the lawn in front of the house, she wandered along the terrace alone, where she might bathe her soul in the effulgence of holy love and light that the words of the anthem had awakened in her being.

She paused at the top of a broad flight of stone steps and leaned against the marble urn that crowned them. Her head rested against the side of the white vase and her face was raised to the star-spangled heavens, while she mused upon the great and glorious things that had been revealed to her by the Spirit of

Truth during these latter days. Then as she gazed she murmured audibly, "O! God, how wonderful are thy works, how mysterious Thy ways when thou dealest with the sons of men! 'Truly all Thy works praise thee and the universe voices Thy wonders; the Morning Stars proclaim Thy glory, and all the Sons of God sing together for joy.' Yes, we now sing together for joy, for we are greater than the morning star, or indeed all these manifested glories of the heavens, for we are Thyself individualized, therefore rulers of these lesser lights that rule the night! Thou lookest through our eyes to behold all Thy glorious creation: Thou feelest through us to experience all the joy and sorrow of living: Thou thinkest through us to know all the glory of the search for knowledge and the attainment of wisdom: Thou lovest through us that thou mayest realize that deepest of all joys in earth or heaven—Holy Love! Who then are we? Who but Thyself made manifest—the mighty God, the everlasting Father expressed in visible form, as in Jesus Christ, with Whom we are joint heirs! There is no other God in the universe but Thyself in highest manifestation through us! There is no other world in our system so beautiful as this planet we call earth! Here it was Thou didst first express Thyself in flesh through Thy early creation Adam and Eve. Here in the ancient cities of Jerusalem Thou didst reveal Thyself again in the Man of Nazareth; and here—yes, here in this New Jerusalem, this ancient Lemuria, now known as Australia, and once called *Tierra Austral del Espiritu Santo* (the South Land of the Holy Spirit)—here Thou wilt arise from among us, and we shall behold Thee and know Thee as the Lord. Then those who wait for Thy appearing shall be glad with a great joy, and these are they who shall never taste of death, but shall **know** Thee and be one with Thee for ever. Then shall they go from strength to strength and at last shall see the King when He appeareth in His beauty!"

Just at this point of her soliloquy Edna felt an arm steal around her waist, and, turning her head,

looked into the tear-dimmed eyes of her beloved mother. Instantly Edna circled the dear form with her arm and drew the iron-grey head down upon her shoulder, while she stroked the gentle face, saying :

"Darling mother, why are you sad? You must not weep because of this coming parting; it will only be for a little while and then we shall be united to part no more."

"Ah! Edna, how do I know that I shall ever live till your return? Your stay abroad is so indefinite," said her mother sadly.

"My mother, do you believe in me?" You said that you did after my return from the city. You have not lost faith, I hope, have you?" asked Edna, looking earnestly into her mother's eyes.

"No, no, Edna, I have not; but it is all so wonderful, so very unusual; it is hard to believe it all possible. Besides, my dear, I sometimes think you may be carried away by excess of spirituality," protested Mrs. Esbourne fearfully, while her voice was tremulous.

"Ah! dearest mother, there are still doubting Thomases in the world to-day, just as there were in Jesus' time. Even one of those who had been with the Master all the time and seen His mighty works had not faith to believe that all things are possible to the Lord. Do not be a doubting Thomas, for verily proofs shall be given unto you in the fulness of time." Edna spoke in convincing tones that quite strengthened the mother's wavering trust in her daughter. Then she lifted her head from Edna's shoulder and said :

"I have faith, I do believe that there is something about to be revealed to the world such as you speak of, and that I shall be spared to see it, perhaps. But that is all I can grasp yet, Edna."

"That is sufficient for the day and hour; all else will be revealed to you in God's own time and then the things that I do and say now you will understand perfectly and recognise the hand of the Lord in all our doings and goings. I only go the way of all souls, mother."

"I never quite understood you before, Edna, and indeed, though I knew you were always different to the rest of my children, yet I never could account for it till I recalled the strange vision I had about your coming the night before you were born, and which you remember I told you about. Well, since then many things have been unfolded to my mind: things that I would have been inclined to dismiss as mere hallucinations, now find a place in the secret recesses of my heart and, like Mary of old, I ponder over them in silence," asserted Mrs. Esbourne.

"That is well, dearest mother, and while you give ear unto the voice of the Spirit you will learn many new truths. The seed in your soul will grow and bear fruit that will produce the germ of immortality. Once this takes root then you will never taste of death—death will no longer have any power over you, as a conscious entity; though forms may change you will live, and know that you are alive, and alive for evermore."

"That is one of the statements which I cannot yet get accustomed to hear you make, Edna, without a feeling of protest arising within me," returned her mother. "Somehow, it seems so hard to believe that we are going to live for ever, when millions before us have died and are still dying," she argued.

"That is just it, mother," replied Edna, "it is because others have been ignorant and believed that they must die, that death has had any power over them. The Bible says, 'Why will ye die?' Now, if it were not possible to live always, why should this be asked by the prophet? No, mother, it is because the Spirit has quickened us in these latter days to know that death has been triumphed over once and for ever and that now God in Man shall live for evermore. They shall not kill him as they did Jesus of Nazareth when He manifested the living God; for He has overcome once and for ever and we are also with Him sons and daughters of God, now, on this earth; for

to-day if we will hear His voice we shall obtain mercy and life eternal."

"Why then have we so long mourned and wept for those who have passed out of sight, and why, if Jesus, nearly two thousand years ago, overcame death and showed us the Christ who never dies, have we as a race, still continued to die?" said Mrs. Esbourne, inquiringly.

"That was the very question He asked the Pharisees in other words, mother dear," answered Edna. "He knew that if any of them really believed on His words, and followed Him in sincerity they should not taste of death, but their faith was not strong enough; and the very fact that the whole human race weeps for the passing out of a soul from their midst is the clearest evidence of the protest of all life against such ignorance on the part of man, who is God's highest manifestation. If mankind really thought that when He laid down the body He would pass into mansions of light and be in the presence of God, why should he so desire to live here, or mourn when his friends or dear ones departed to that other shore? Is it not because the whole body of humanity is the *living God*? Then when a portion of that manifested life dies it is a drop of His blood (which is the Life of all life) shed."

"Oh! Edna, I am afraid, my dear, I cannot follow you in these high flights of spiritual thought: you must speak in more ordinary language till I can become accustomed to your way of reasoning out these things." interposed Mrs. Esbourne, with a pucker of her brow, which made her daughter smile tenderly upon her, and, stooping, kiss the dear brow to smooth its wrinkles away.

"All right, mother darling, I will say it in more homely phrase, and to your question why we mourn for those who have passed out of our sight I answer: it is because in the degree of manifestation to which the One Life has attained on this earth, Jesus Christ is the highest perfection of life revealed as in the human

being—Who is God in the Highest—and we all should reach the fulness of the stature of Christ by conscious soul-growth ; therefore, when one of our number falls short of that, or fails to attain to the highest expression of the One eternal Life—in which there is no possibility of death—we naturally regret that loss in the development of the Great Tree of Life which is in the centre of the garden—that which sprang from the very heart of all God's creations. We who can see beyond the present degree of growth know that there is a higher consciousness yet to be reached, and with that realization a glorious perfection and rich fruition. The failure to arrive at that is to our now enlightened minds and opened vision a distinct loss and therefore a cause of keen regret. Just as we look upon a tree laden with its fruit, and, knowing the state to which perfection will bring it, watch and hope for that condition only ; indeed, nothing short of which will satisfy our demands ; then, when a quantity of the fruit is cast before its time we regret that these have not reached the full degree of development that might have been theirs, but while in an immature state and green, hard and sour, have fallen short of that perfection to which they were destined to attain in the beginning, but were not strong enough to reach. Now they have become only fitted to enrich the soil which nourishes the parent tree at whose feet they lie, and so add greater strength to those still left upon its branches and thus aid them in reaching the maturity that these others missed, or fell short of.

“ So with the human fruit which falls from the Tree of Life. These are what are called ‘ the mighty cloud of witnesses ’ that have helped to enrich the soul of man while it has grown to its present stage of development in the world as we know it to-day and which is yet to be. They are the great influence for good which has overcome the corresponding influence for evil, or ignorance of man to attain to the best, and all these who have fallen short of their highest possibilities will have to pass through other stages of soul-evolution ere

they can attain to the perfection which they fell short of in the beginning. Yet the very effort made by them, though it did not reach the highest that was possible, has not been lost, since it has enriched the one Universal Life and has given strength and power to those who survive, thus enabling them to go up and on in the path of progress to the great goal of all souls—Eternal Life, conscious individual LIFE. The Life of the God revealed in the Man, who, as the finite is everlastingly co-existent with the Infinite.”

Just as Edna finished this last remark, and before her mother could offer any comment upon the subject, Mr. Esbourne, accompanied by Roger Northbrook, came strolling towards them, and as the group met, the conversation turned on subjects of general interest.

Later the party dispersed, the two elders returning to the house, while Roger and Edna descended the steps into the garden, where they strolled together arm in arm, till they found themselves in the avenue where they had stood at midnight three years ago, beneath the pale light of a November moon, and their souls had been welded into one before their hearts were united or their lips had ever met, or their tongues uttered the words that had now made them one for ever.

The trees that had been so terribly scorched by the ravages of fire seemed to have put forth a greater wealth of foliage than ever. It was as if the purifying flames had burned away all that was superfluous and only the best remained. The branches mingled overhead in a green canopy through which the stars shone brightly this clear cool April night, as the pair wandered through its leafy collonade.

The music and voices of the singers in the house reached them, softened and mellowed by distance, and their hearts beat in unison to the strains of the song which Edna loved. As she stepped by Roger's side she unconsciously found herself joining in the chorus which the others were just then singing :

"We shall know as we are known, never more to walk alone ;

In the dawning of the morning of that bright and happy day,

We shall know each other better when the mists have rolled away."

"Why, my darling, you are overflowing with gladness to-night," observed Roger, looking into her eyes with love and adoration.

"Of course I am, my beloved. How could it be otherwise ?" she answered, smiling up at him. "Has not our Father done great and glorious things for us ? And He is going to do still more wonderful things in the days that are to come. Oh ! Joshua, my husband, my well-beloved !" she continued earnestly, "you have yet much to learn of the mysteries of the Kingdom. Though you have been highly favored of the Lord, there is so much more to be revealed ; but the time is not yet ripe even for you to receive these great revelations, but it will be my privilege to unfold many things to you in the days that are coming."

"Come, then, dearest," he said, smiling at her enthusiasm, "let us sit here on this seat, and spend the last hours of this beautiful Sunday evening together—here, where I first beheld you praying, and my soul bowed herself in worship before her true mate."

Then he led her to the seat indicated, and placed himself by her side, saying, "Now just open your soul's treasure-house to me as you used to do. I little knew in the days that I first trod these paths that life could ever hold such true joy for any human being as is mine this night, Edna—my soul's dear wife."

"Have I not told you, beloved, that eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for those that love Him, and Him alone," replied Edna solemnly.

"Yes, I know that, but thought it only a quotation from the Bible, and took it—as we take many others—

to mean in that far-away distant place called 'heaven,' " he answered.

" But you will yet know that every word spoken there has a meaning here and now. A meaning for you, for me, and for every living soul on earth. For as God and Man are one and the same in essence, so heaven and earth are also one ; the first is the real and the second is the image thereof, but the seeming two are indissolubly one. The earth and Man are the actuality ; God and heaven are the reality ; while that which we name the ideal is the hovering Spirit—the Holy Ghost—over all, to bring forth the highest ideal to ultimate perfection. Then outside of these three—this Trinity in Unity—there is nothing greater, grander or more omnipotent ; for IT only is God and there is none other."

" True, dear one. I know all this now from your lips, but before I learned to know the Truth myself, and to love you with the holiest part of my nature, I used to think that a great deal of what you said was very beautiful and idealistic, yet most extravagant. But now, Edna, I know that all you speak is the outcome of the direct teaching of the Spirit, and as such must be received and believed, even if not always understood, any more than Jesus was in His day and generation. But the interpretation will surely come to those who in faith receive the ingrafted Word."

" You have spoken truth, dear husband, for there is nothing hidden that shall not be revealed. If you will listen to what the Spirit of Truth and Wisdom imparts to your soul in the Silence, you will get mysteries unravelled to you such as I have lately received," affirmed Edna.

" I verily believe, dear, that you will unravel the riddle of the Sphinx yet, if you search as determinedly as you have done for these Higher Truths," observed Roger, smiling down at her.

" I will, I can ! Of that I am assured, since desire is true prophecy ! " cried Edna with conviction, as she glanced up at him. " Indeed," she continued, " I

think I have already partially unravelled the meaning of the 'Stigma of the Sphinx.' "

"Have you indeed, my Thaumaturge?" he exclaimed, laughing, as he gave her a name he sometimes applied to her when in humorous mood, because of her wonder-working powers.

"Yes, I have," she averred, not heeding his merriment. "You know—or at least I assume you do, dear, seeing that you have travelled through the wonderful land of Egypt—it has been said and written that the secret of the Sphinx will, when solved, reveal all the mysteries, and that will be when lost Israel is restored. Also that it is said, 'the Stigma of the Sphinx' is marked upon the whole face of the earth?"

He assented that he was aware of the general ideas which existed in the civilized world regarding the history of the pyramids and the Sphinx of ancient Egypt. Then added, "Did you know, dear, that it is supposed that the Great Pyramid of Cheops was built at the instigation of a shepherd king, supposed to come from Ur of the Chaldees, and it is even stated that it was Melchizedek, King of Salem? The object of the building of the Great Pyramid was outwardly as an observatory, but in reality, from the form of its construction, it was intended to conceal the mysteries of the Order of a Great Brotherhood of Wisdom, till the dark ages had passed and the Light of the East should again be restored; and that the Sphinx also is the guardian of sacred mysteries and is the talisman of the planet—the key to the secrets of the ages?"

"Oh! I did not know all that, Joshua," she said eagerly, "but I have read a great deal about the Great Pyramid, and from what I gathered I thought it had a deeper meaning for the human race than we know of. I read what Isaiah says about 'an altar to the Lord in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar at the border thereof;' so it seems to me to mean more than a monument to the wisdom of the early astrologers. I think it symbolizes the ascent of man as a soul from matter to spirit, as shown through all those dark

passages right to the grand gallery and into the king's chamber, till he, as an illumined one, shall know the meaning of the mystic measurements that lie concealed in the length and breadth and height of the empty coffer in the centre of the king's chamber."

"Why, many wise men have not achieved that much regarding those wonders of the world, dear," he responded.

"Nothing is too great for the soul that aspires to know," said Edna gravely, "but apart from the pyramid, more particularly have I wondered what was meant by the Stigma of the Sphinx. Only the other evening I was pondering over the words which I found in a book which said 'The stigma of the Sphinx is written upon the face of our earth.' Then all at once I said silently, 'What is the stigma of the Sphinx, O! Lord?' Then the answer came like this:

"The stigma of the Sphinx is the degradation of woman. The Sphinx is the symbolism of this, as her form reveals. She has the head and bust of Virgo and the body of Leo. The upper portion of this fabled monster of the desert is in the form of a woman, and so reveals the highest, holiest creation of the Almighty. She is the symbolism of the soul—the Divine Feminine. From her milky breasts all humanity is nourished, and Man—the embryo God—himself draws his sustenance therefrom. But, alas! the body is in the form of the beast, Leo—the lion—thus symbolizing that the animal nature in man degrades the soul—woman—so that she is held in bondage to the carnal lusts of the flesh: is subject to the lower creation, or the animal kingdom through which she evolved. The stigma is upon the whole face of the earth.

"Yes, Lord, the prostitution by man of the womanhood of the race is indeed the stigma of the Sphinx, and it is written large in these supposedly enlightened days throughout the length and breadth of all lands. But, I pray Thee, O Lord God Almighty, that I Thy messenger may be elected to redeem my beloved sex

from this carnal bondage and moral degradation. That it may be my mission to unfold to woman her own glorious divinity, as the Motherhood of the Creator—the chosen vessel created to hold the Life of God! Thus shall the riddle of the Sphinx be solved and the stigma shall be wiped out from off the face of this fair earth for ever—and especially may this be so in our own beloved land—Australia.” Here she paused and there was silence for a few seconds, till, raising her eyes to Roger’s face, she asked gently :

“Do you not think that I have about solved the true meaning of the riddle of the Sphinx?”

“Yes,” he answered ruminatingly, for her words had set him thinking. “It seems that is most probably the mystic interpretation. But do you know, dear, that while you were speaking there flashed upon my mind the remembrance of a very beautiful and yet remarkable picture which I chanced to see during my travels. It was one that always mystified me, and just as you spoke about the head and bust of the Sphinx representing the divine in humanity—the Soul—as well as the holiness of womankind, so this picture now conveys to my mind the same idea.”

“What was it, Joshua? Can you describe it?”

“I think so, though perhaps imperfectly,” he answered. “It was a large canvas, and depicted the form of a beautiful woman whose feet and lower portions of the body as far as the bust and shoulders were visible only—most perfect in form and very lovely—but the head and face were enveloped in white fleecy clouds. Of course, it was an allegory and meant to convey the true meaning of the mystery of woman. The fact of her being depicted as appearing feet first is a symbolism of the estimation in which man has held her until now. Man has really never known woman, for she has not yet revealed her true self. She is hidden in the clouds and mists of man’s sense-consciousness, and until his spiritual vision is clarified (as mine has been lately) he will never be able to pierce the clouds

of mystery that envelop her and hide from him her glorious features—the face of a goddess.”

“What a wonderful conception the picture was!” remarked Edna. “I think it very fine and also consider that you have solved the meaning of your pictured mystery just as I believe I have mine in stone. I know, dearest, that you are able to look upon the face of the Divine Woman and, while looking, to hold her as divine. By so doing you will see her unfold daily before your eyes and reveal greater glories to your soul—things that cannot be uttered. For, to the regenerate man, woman is gradually unveiling herself and those who have purified themselves from the desires and carnal lusts of the flesh shall be enabled to behold her in all her pristine glory, as she came forth from the eternal; and so seeing her, know her for what she truly is—man’s soul personified—his own Divine Self objectified. Then the seeming two are for ever one, as they were in the beginning, and that *One* is part of the Grand Man of the Universe (the Macrocosm) revealed in the Perfected Humanity (the Microcosm).

“I pray, dear, that all men may soon come to that great and wondrous consummation: may learn to know their true selves in the face and form of a good and holy woman, and so knowing her to keep her thus before themselves and their God. Then we may soon hope to behold the Grand Man of the Universe stand forth in all His revealed glory. But Edna, can you rightly understand Who is this Grand Man of the Universe?” he questioned.

“By the enlightening power of the Spirit I think I do. But it is one of the mysteries of the New Kingdom, Joshua,” she replied in reverent tones. “I will, however, impart just as much of it as you are ready for now, and if you will listen very attentively I will show you something that was revealed to me only the other night when I was thinking over the heralded wonders of the New Day that is just dawning.”

“You always have my best attention, dearest,

when you unveil your soul to me—that you well know,” he asserted quietly.

“Well, you know there is but one God and one Man, Jesus Christ,” she began. “You have also grasped the great truth that all humanity is one. Now humanity is the Jesus, or visible expression of the Infinite Love—God. All compose the one great Body of the One Man—Christ—and One Father—God. But just as we are bodies composed of many parts and each part is in itself a complete whole—yet interdependent upon every other part and inseparable from the One perfect Whole—so the microcosm is as the macrocosm: the part is an exact counterpart of the one harmonious Whole. Then the seeming two are One—Man and his Body; God and Man; Christ and His Church. All are *one*.

“Then this Divine Man of which all Humanity reveals and forms parts, portions, organs, and members must be perfected in every part; every organ must be fully developed, every atom well, sound and whole within itself, ere God can be revealed in His creation of Himself. Thus the Jesus must show us the Christ in ourselves (always perfect from the first and in essence immaculate) and the Christ always reveals to us the Father—or Lord God.

“The world visible is the divine garment which clothes this Divine Man. Every kingdom of Nature contributes her quota in the weaving of this glorious apparel in which He is robed. It is various and of many colors, wondrous in variety, texture and construction. He wears four different robes each year, every one a harmony in color and of a distinct type of beauty in itself. Nature weaves them out of the materials in her own vast storehouse. It is thus that they are seamless robes, since each portion is interlaced with the other and there is no division. Evolution is continuous and each kingdom is interdependent upon and dovetailed with the preceding one. Yes, it is a seamless robe indeed which our Lord Christ wears as a symbolism of the universal robe that covers the One

and Only Divine Man—the Lord God Omnipotent. It is the seamless robe of love, and Love Himself has woven it in the loom of life out of the great heart of Nature, for Love brought forth all for its own glory and honor to adorn its own majestic form. This is the robe that must be worn by every son of God ere the One Divine Man can be shown forth to all the world as God individualized. Then, Joshua, my well-beloved, then will the hidden mystery of the ages be revealed and the Divinity so long lost in Humanity at last shine forth as the Son in the Kingdom of our Father. All mankind shall know that he is living in the Kingdom of God and all its treasures are his: that he has been there in reality from the beginning, but only as a son who is as yet an infant, and so knows not the glory and greatness of his Father nor the vastness of his inheritance—for the Universe is his home.”

Here the woman paused for a while and sat back in her seat with her eyes closed. The man by her side encircled her form with his arm and drew her close to him, saying as he kissed the lips that had just uttered such profound truths—

“My darling, you are very wonderful, but I fear you are weary. Your mind is too active, your soul too great for your body. I am afraid you will let those spiritual fires that gleam in your eyes consume all your strength, and leave me only the beautiful vessel which held the divine oil. I think it is Michelet who says, ‘Oh! Woman! fragile globe of incomparable alabaster wherein burns the lamp of God.’ Now, Maya, beloved, I desire my alabaster globe to last for ever, and the lamp of God to burn there throughout all eternity, as you have already prophesied it will, and if you persist in consuming the precious oil so recklessly, I doubt if it will last till the Bridegroom cometh.”

She raised her face, with a sweet smile upon her lips, as she said, “Oh! Joshua, fearful one! Why do you doubt the infinitude of Spirit? Know you not

that it is limitless, tireless ; that the more abundantly you draw from those inexhaustible springs of Truth the more generously will you be supplied ! It is indeed the Water of Life and Love that flows so freely, and every day giveth something new, something greater and grander than all that has gone before."

"Then you have surely proved the fallacy of Solomon's saying, that 'there is nothing new under the sun,' " he ventured, smiling.

"Ah ! but Solomon searched only in the fields of intellect, for you know, in the Bible story, he represents worldly wisdom and to such there is in truth nothing new. It is all but an old, old story dished up in a new way, or an old actor in a new role. Had he sought where his father David looked for wisdom and light he might have discovered spiritual insight which reveals something still more wondrous to the eyes of the soul and which, like the manna in the wilderness, may be gathered fresh every day."

"It is most difficult to confound you, dear," he remarked, as he inwardly wondered at the answer she had given to his words. "But as your wisdom comes from a higher source than Solomon, will you teach me how to acquire it in the same manner as you have taught me where to find your God and know Him as you, too, do, and so have given me a taste of the 'peace that passeth all understanding' ?"

"Why, of course I will," she asserted readily. "How can you ever doubt that I can have anything that I would not share with you. Before we go indoors I will tell you of the last great thought that was vouchsafed to me, and it is a prophecy of the times that are now at hand, for it shows that the crucifixion of God is almost finished and soon that great cry will ring to the uttermost parts of the earth, not only from Calvary's mount. Then it will be but three days till the final resurrection when He Who is to come will come—when the Ancient of Days will rise, to sleep in earth—or flesh—no more." She paused for a few

moments and then laid her right hand in that of her soul's husband while she continued :

" It was in the early morning that the Spirit of the Lord was upon me and it was shown unto me that the Grand Man of the Universe dies daily till the hour of the final dissolution, when He shall cry aloud as the great world consummation is reached—*It is finished!* The blood that is shed from the great world-heart—or the heart of the suffering God—is the human life that dies every minute by the hundreds and thousands ; for the life of man is the blood of God ! Then, oh ! Man, why will ye die, for your life is the life of your Lord and your only God—Jehovah Almighty ! But though He suffer He can never be slain. He is eternal. The ache and pangs of the dying God on the cross of the universe is the dumb pain of suffering humanity to-day. All through the long dark ages, with every throe of the martyrs, every throb of a suffering heart, a sorrowing soul, has the God in Man shared the agony. They who inflicted it upon those suffering, devoted human beings thought, like the Jews, that they were serving the God of Heaven, but it was only an idol in their own minds and conceived by their own imaginations—not the Unknown God. Then to this idol or ghost of God, mankind made sacrifices of their fellow creatures, and all the while they were in reality torturing their one and only true God. From the beginning of the world the Son of God suffers in the Son of Man.

" The slow and lingering death of Jesus on Calvary's cross of wood—that was not consummated till the sun had set and darkness covered all the land, a full day of torture—is a symbolism of those long dark ages through which the soul of man has been passing in its journey from the human to the Divine. The blood was shed drop by drop from the heart of that dying God, beginning at the head and descending to the hands and feet. Then, last of all, the centre was reached in the wound that was inflicted in that pierced side where the great heart throbbed with undying love—love that could use its last breath to cry aloud,

‘Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’ But, mark that from here gushed forth water *and* blood; for no man can rob God, and the heart of the Son is the throne of the Father, where He reigns as Life—Immortal *Life*! The interpretation thereof is this:—

“The great body of Humanity is the Body of the Grand Man of the Universe, and this Man must suffer on the cross of sacrifice from the head to the feet, and lastly the heart being pierced, the pure water of life will gush forth, testifying to His final purification and complete redemption from matter, to His original state, Spirit, thus establishing His right to now claim His waiting divinity: to receive His crown of triumph and be glorified with the glory of His Father which was His before the world was, for is He not the Father at last made manifest, and can say ‘I and my Father are One’? In this manner must the body of humanity likewise suffer individually and collectively, on every plane of manifestation; in every degree of unfoldment; from the natural to the spiritual; from the spiritual to the Divine. And every individual that thus overcometh, as did Jesus, the same is like Him—a Christ and very Son of the Living God. To him who will not strive to reach perfection there is no glory promised, there is no crown of triumph prepared and laid up in the kingdom, but his talent of life shall be taken from him and given unto another.

“The head—the mind of man—which represents faith—must grasp the truth of being, and this can only be done by his wearing the crown of thorns and feeling the blood drops fall from wounds on the brow. ‘Then this wearing of the crown of thorns is a symbol of his triumph over the lower kingdoms of life, and is the only means of attaining to the crown of glory, and power and dominion.

“The hands, that represent works, must also be pierced after they are willingly spread out to receive the marks of the nails, for thus only are the works tested and the faith justified. Head and hands must

thus in unity consecrate themselves to sacrifice, or both faith and works are dead, being alone or at variance, so there can be no at-one-ment.

“ The feet—which represent understanding—must also be as one—overlapped—not separated, and though the wounds therein are dual, the nail that inflicts them shall be but *one*, and be as the head and the hands, united in the grasp of the great Truths of the Spirit. Thus by oneness without separation of any members—or division on any plane—shall be revealed to the whole body, the mysteries of God.

“ The body, then, must know it is the temple *only* in which the Divine Life dwells for a season, and as soon as it realizes this it will cry aloud, ‘ My God ! my God ! Why hast Thou forsaken me ? ’ But this forsaking is only the death of the personal to reveal the individual. It is but the ephemeral passing away, that the eternal may stand forth absolute. In the Bible story, the Jesus dies that the Christ may live for ever.

“ The last dregs of the cup of bitterness are being quaffed by humanity to-day. The head has suffered for many ages before it would willingly wear the crown of thorns. The hands have been long in learning to stretch themselves out to receive the prints of the nails—to learn what true charity means. But at last both hands and head have won the victory and faith and works go together now united in the world of men. The feet, too, have been able to stand at length as one—to be overlapped—and thus to prepare themselves for the wedge of truth, which has nailed them to the tree of life, and so, through experience, shed the blood of ignorance, which had so long triumphed in the world of souls. Then the eyes of man have been opened and wisdom illumines his pathway, where his feet now walk in unison till he finds them rest upon the one and only sure foundation, the ‘ rock of understanding,’ and this is ever the Rock of Ages.

“ To-day is this thing come to pass and now we listen with open ears to the cry of liberty heard as it is

throughout the length and breadth of the lands. All nations of the earth are echoing it far and wide, till the last prison gate that has held the soul of man in bondage will be unlocked and the glad cry of freedom will resound to the four corners of the globe. Then, then, beloved, the Grand Man of the Universe will shed His blood (human life) no more. The last drop will fall when the great heart of *LOVE* has been pierced with the Spear of Might, and only the pure water of eternal life shall gush therefrom—an electric fluid that shall take the place of blood in the veins of man. Then mankind shall die no more for ever : death is overcome and the body of the Universal Man—the Manifested God—will live for evermore. Death is swallowed up in life, the dominion over all is attained ! ”

“ Hush ! beloved, listen ! Let us strain our ears to hear the voice of the Lord that speaketh unto us in these latter days, for the cry is about to re-echo far and wide ‘ *It is finished.* ’ Yes, in very truth the world’s tragedy is consummated ; the Jesus dies that the Christ of God may live and reign for ever. Harken to the voice of the expiring Son of Man, for His accents are the prophecy of our redemption. The words He utters are but the promise of the coming of one greater than He, and His death but gives Him birth. The Son of Man is dead : the Son of God liveth !

“ This glorious cry of triumph is about to be wafted over the whole wide world and every ear shall hear it, and every eye shall see Him and know it is indeed the Lord. The shame of the cross is wiped out for ever and the stars that form it in the firmament shall fall from their places, for the death in life that they have so long been symbols of, shall have passed away into oblivion, for the Lord is a living God and reigneth from everlasting till everlasting as life, Infinite Life !

“ Beloved, it hath been revealed to me that we are the servants and messengers of the living God to this generation. We are chosen by His Spirit to be the prophets of these latter days, and to us He will

reveal His secrets, and teach us His ways, that we may go forth and proclaim to the whole world that the time is at hand, the days are fulfilled. Then let all those who wait for the Lord in spirit and in truth sing together for joy, for He is an avenger of the wrongs of His people ; He is a just and holy One. He cometh in mercy and love to redeem Jerusalem and gather His elect from all the ends of the earth, for 'Where the carcase is, there will the eagles be gathered.' The people of the Lord will all gather into the New Jerusalem, which the Spirit has revealed to me is Australia—the ancient Lemuria, where the third race was evolved and the advanced souls of which became the great teachers to the fourth race of humanity—the Atlantean. Thus Australia, now risen from the waters, is the long-lost Eden, and though the last of the lands she is really the first. Then there shall be no more sea, and Zion's holy hill shall be set up in New Zealand—a fair land and a free ; a cleansed and purified land whose rulers are just and deal righteously ; a land veritably flowing with milk and honey, with peace and plenty, blessed as was Canaan of old. Thus shall Australia and New Zealand be one continent as of yore, and the A and Z—Alpha and Omega—the first and the last of all lands.

“ Then lift up your heads, ye golden gates of the South ! for the year of the Lord's redeemed has come, and they shall come with songs unto Sion and shall dwell together in peace and harmony and know no more sorrow nor pain nor death, for God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and shall walk and dwell with His people for ever.

“ Into this glorious kingdom the prophets, apostles, priests, kings, saints and martyrs, patriarchs and disciples of Jesus Christ shall be born and know that they are in very truth in the Kingdom of God with Him to reign for ever. It is said that 'some shall call themselves Jacob, and others shall subscribe themselves Israel,' and this shall indeed be so, for

these shall rise out of the loins of the Children of the first Resurrection, and from henceforth shall die nevermore. Death shall have no more power over them once they are born into the Kingdom of our God and His Christ. They will never go out any more, but shall extol the Lord from everlasting to everlasting.

“In this holy city King David shall arise and reign, and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob shall know that the Lord their God in whom they trusted has not come short of His promises. Abraham shall indeed see that his seed is numerous as the sands of the sea-shore and he shall be extolled and known as ‘the Father of the Faithful.’ Everyone that has called upon the name of the Lord God Almighty in sincerity and truth shall arise again in that glorious kingdom to receive the reward of the works done in the body, while they inhabited their various temples of flesh during the soul’s unfoldment.

“Many kings and rulers from afar shall hear of the fame of this city and marvel at the wonders thereof, for hath not Micah the prophet said: ‘But in the last days it shall come to pass that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and the people shall flow into it. And many nations shall come and say: ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths, for the law shall go forth out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge among many people and rebuke strong nations afar off.’

“Yes, beloved, the ‘Lord shall be a trap to the whole earth,’ and only those who watch for His appearing in love and sincerity alone shall see Him when He cometh first to judge the earth, after which the world shall behold Him when He arises in all the beauty of holiness and the majesty of His power and glory. Let us be faithful and true to the light that

has been shed upon our souls, and we shall surely receive that crown of life which fadeth not away. Come, we are henceforth the heralds of the New Kingdom—the Kingdom of Universal Love ! ”

“ The past is a story told ;
The future shall be writ in gold.”

FINIS.



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